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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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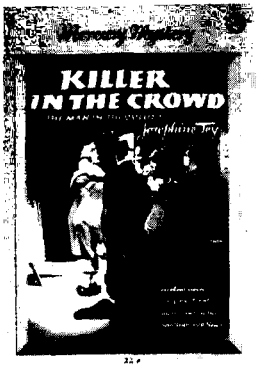

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Harry Miner's only previous appearance in EQMM was in our November 1951 issue, when we published Mr. Miner's first story, "Corpus Delicti." That story, you will recall, dealt with post-war Germany — or, as the author himself expressed it at the time, "with the downfall of Berlin amid scenes of catastrophe." Mr. Miner's first piece of fiction was marked by realism of detail — a compelling authenticity based on first-hand knowledge of the locale and actual living conditions described in the story.

Now, after three long years, Mr. Miner comes through with another prize-winning tale. Again the strong sense of realism will impress you — this time, a simple, warm realism against a background of rural Wisconsin. "Due Process" is a gem of a story — there are no flaws discernible to the naked eye, and it is cut with admirable precision. You will take Sheriff Chris Christiansen to your heart, as you will take the theme of this story to your head, and we hope you will remember both "until it snows popcorn."

DUE PROCESS

by HARRY MINER

CHRIS CHRISTIANSEN HAD WON A lot of elections in Lake County, Wisconsin — won them not only for himself but for his whole ticket. Many a hard-pressed Assemblyman or Congressman had been nudged into office by lopsided Lake County majorities attributable largely to Chris's name on the slate.

It seems inadequate to say that Chris was our sheriff. He was our sage. We didn't see much difference between him and Sherlock Holmes, except that Chris smoked Standard in a corncob instead of shag in a clay, and his hunting cap had only one peak. He had grown old in the office, his hair was white, and he had become just a trifle bent, though his eyes remained as blue as lake ice in winter. We had no crime laboratories and didn't need them — not while we had Chris. He knew all of us, on farm and in town, well enough to know all the angles and triangles, the rivalries and ambitions, without having to do any newfangled scientific detective work.

Furthermore, he had a kindly way of serving summonses and dispossess notices, and after all that was the main part of his job. He had nothing but friends, and he had all his friends educated to vote. So he was a prime

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asset to his party, and for himself he had what looked like a lifetime tenure in the most lucrative county office.

Until the Loomis case came along.

Chris or no Chris, politics runs in cycles. There came a time when his party was slumping way down and Chris was about the only decent prop it had left. So the opposition got to work on Chris. Just with whispers, at first. He was old, and old-fashioned. The county was growing up, and naturally its criminal resources should grow up along with everything else. How long would Chris's antimacassar methods be good enough? We'd put off modernizing the fire department until the veneer mill burned. Were we going to wait for some horrible crime to occur right here in Lake County before we modernized our sheriff's office?

And just about the time people quit scoffing at these whispers and began to take enough notice of them to argue against them, old lady Trully came in and said her son Louie had disappeared — and the Loomis case cracked around Chris's head.

When the facts got out, we took it for granted that Louie was dead and that his uncle Gus Loomis had killed him. The problem was to prove it was Loomis, so justice could be done.

Louie was no good. He was a pool-hall bum, mean as dirt to his ma, and when he did get a few dollars of his own it was more often by shady means than by honest work. Gus Loomis had tried him as a hired hand on the farm, and Louie had chiseled on the feed money and finally got caught holding back part of the payment for some cows. Loomis whopped him off the place with a wagon stake, and after that they really had it in for each other.

Yet one night Louie had gone out to Gus's place in a dark howling blizzard, and had never been seen again.

We found that Louie had hitched a ride on the evening newspaper truck as far as the cheese factory corner, where the township road past Loomis's place crosses the State highway. The season's first storm was just beginning; the snow was wet and heavy, and the cold wind hadn't yet begun to drive it. Louie had told the driver he was going to Gus's. Said he was going to pick up some money.

This was borne out by his pool-hall pals, who said he'd been bragging for a couple of days that he knew how to pry some cash out of old Mouldy-Dough Gus. He'd even given a broad hint of his methods when, one time, he'd said, "Man his age plays around with gals, he's gotta pay for his fun."

After that, it didn't take the community any trouble to figure out what had happened. Since his wife died, Loomis had trouble keeping his hired girls. For all his surly ways, he was a solid man in the township — had served a few terms as town chairman, was secretary of the Equity, and a leader in the cheese factory co-op. Whether or not Louie had seen anything scandalous while he worked on the farm, Loomis could hardly afford to have him going around saying

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things. It was a good set-up for blackmail, and Louie was just the kind that would think of it.

Loomis on his part was just the kind of hard-bitten, knotty old farmer that wouldn't stand for it. But he was not only cranky, he was shrewd.

Chris and Sam LaFond, his Under-Sheriff, went out to see Gus as soon as the snow plows got the roads open. Sure, said Loomis, Louie was here that night. Walked up from the cheese factory and tried to hit him for some money. Said he owed him back wages, which was a durned lie. Loomis had run him off the place. Didn't know what had happened to him. Maybe he got lost in the blizzard. Loomis himself hadn't been out all that day, and certainly wasn't going to chase that bum through a snowstorm.

Well, a northern Wisconsin winter is no joke. Peering through the frost that coated Loomis's kitchen window an inch thick, Chris surveyed the bleak, drift-piled landscape. The farmhouse stood on a hillside, its pillared porch fronting on the road, and south across the road stretched the fields and cleared pastures. That day they were deep billowy seas of glittering white. The tops of the fence posts, where they emerged, formed black dotted lines across the white expanse; the plowed road cut through it like a little canyon; the telephone poles and trees were stark as masts.

The land was clear, too, toward the east, where it sloped down to the State highway. But to the north and west, Loomis's yard merged into the forest which swept over hill, swamp, river, and lake in miles of desolate and deserted wilderness. Rabbits on their snowshoe feet could move there, and birds and chipmunks left lacy trails; but the deer were yarded for the winter in the impenetrable, stinking spruce swamps, each access guarded by a buck whose lowered antlers kept off the starving wolves.

"Mind if we look around?" asked Chris.

"You think I got him here? Sure, go and look!"

So they prowled through the chilly house — Loomis kept a fire only in the kitchen — and through the barn, where the cattle chomped with breath steaming from their nostrils, and the manure steamed underfoot; through the shed, where packed snow from the runners of the sleigh lay without melting on the dirt floor; through hayloft and henhouse, and down into the root-cellar.

Then they went back to town, got a few more men and snowshoes, and went over the area around the house. Loomis jeered at them from his porch.

"I'll have coffee ready when you get through," he yelled.

"Thank you kindly, we'll need it," called Chris, as, muffled in earlaps, scarf, and mackinaw, he directed operations from a stump near the edge of the woods.

Loomis made good on his word. While they stacked their snowshoes and stamped off their boots on the back porch, he laid out cups and be-

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gan pouring from an enameled two-gallon pot that was steaming on the wood-stove.

"Bound and determined I done away with him, aren't you, Chris?" he said, in a tone that was not exactly cheery.

"Now, Gus," explained the old man, "if I didn't check over everything, folks would say I was slack in my duty."

"Check and be damned to you!" retorted Gus.

Chris sipped the hot coffee audibly.

"Y'know, Gus," he said, "maybe I could give you some advice, if you won't get mad."

"What sort of advice?"

"Well, it's easy to understand if Louie made you blow up. He's a no-good one. If he said some of the things about me 't he's been sayin' about you, durned if I wouldn't have a mind to bust him one myself."

"Like what?" demanded Gus.

"Point is, if you'd hit him, and he fell down and maybe hurt himself, 't wouldn't be too hard to understand. Could be 't wasn't your fault."

Loomis glowered at him.

"What's come into you, Chris? If I'd hit him, I'd say so. I didn't make no bones about it the other time, did I?"

"No, but Louie wasn't missing after the other time."

Gus snorted.

"What's he been saying?"

"We hear he's dropped a few nasty hints about you and your hired girls, Gus, Christiansen said."

"Huh! If I'd known that, maybe I would 'a' pasted him."

"Well . . ." Chris swirled the coffee in his cup and drained it, and his deputies began to rise. "You sure, now, that Louie wasn't hurt none when he left here?"

"No, I tell you!"

"All right, Gus. Thanks for the coffee."

Back in Chris's office in the courthouse, Sam LaFond pulled off his rubber pacs and stretched his stockinged feet toward the hissing steam radiator.

"A man *can* get lost in a blizzard," he commented.

"He can," nodded Chris, "especially at night."

"Pretty soon he'd get tired and stop to rest."

"And fall asleep and never wake up. It's happened many a time."

"In that case, Chris, we won't find Louie under the snow until spring," Sam declared. "And if he got into the woods, we might never find him."

"He didn't go into the woods, and he didn't get lost."

LaFond looked at him, but Chris did not continue. So Sam asked, "Well, what's the next step? Go out and get Loomis?"

Chris turned his head and gazed at Sam with clear, surprised eyes.

"Why, nobody saw no crime, Sam, and we ain't got a body to prove there was one. What would we charge him with?"

"But you said —"

"I know. I think Loomis killed

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him, and I think I know what he did afterward. But you can't punish a person on the basis of one man's notions, Sam — even a sheriff's. Strange as it may seem, even Chris Christiansen can be wrong. It might shock a lot of people to hear me say so, but even a whole community can be wrong. That's why in the wisdom of our long experience we've piled up a body of laws that say a man mustn't be punished unless you got clear demonstrable proof against him. . . . No, for a time we ain't goin' to do much of anything, Sam."

And they didn't. And then the whispers began to be spoken right out loud. Here was a major crime — our first one in ages — and Chris wasn't up to the test. A smart man like Gus could handcuff him. As long as we kept old Chris in the sheriff's office, anybody who wanted to could solve his personal problems with an axe. Next time it might not be a worthless galoot like Louie; it might be me or you — we all had our enemies.

They demanded that Chris get out and look for that body.

"Look, men," he argued, "the blizzard ran for two days, and it was another two days before we got out there. If there was a body — which I ain't admittin' for the record — Loomis could have lugged it anywhere in the northwest part of Lake County. He could have stuck it under a windfall. He could have shoved it under a brush pile. He had time to chop a hole in the ice and sink it in the lake. Whatever he did, the snow's covered the traces. There's a million acres of wild country to cover out there and nothin' sure to look for. Now, does it make sense to waste the taxpayers' money on that kind of a search?"

"Lord help you if we find it!" they replied; and out they went, about fifty of them on skis and snowshoes, hoping by some lucky chance to solve the crime and blow old Chris out of local politics. But they didn't come up with anything. They didn't even get coffee from Loomis, who charged out with a 16-gauge shotgun and ran them off his place, and then came in to complain to Chris.

"Either you arrest me and take the consequences," Gus demanded, "or else you see I'm treated like a law-abidin' taxpayer!"

"I'll see what I can do," Chris sighed.

"Well, you ain't doin' well enough. No wonder folks are sayin' you're through!"

Chris stared at him with his bright blue eyes opened wide. And in the scowling face of the farmer, he fancied — or was it only his imagination? — that he could see just a trace of lurking mockery.

"They're sayin' that, Gus, only because I ain't locked you up."

"Well, they're right. If I did anything wrong, I ought to be locked up. If I didn't, whoever did ought to be locked up. You ought to find Louie and get these people off my neck. I'm entitled to protection. So's the community."

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Chris pointed the reed stem of his corncob at him.

"They'll get their protection. I ain't failed yet and I ain't goin' to start failin' now. You mark that down, Gus Loomis!"

"Tsh! Just keep 'em off my place!"

So Chris went around to the leaders of the volunteer posse and told them he couldn't tolerate any more trespassing.

"No matter what you think about Gus, he's still got his rights," Chris said, "and there ain't no call for vigilantes."

"Well, somebody's got to enforce the law, Chris. We ain't all satisfied to sit on our duffs."

Chris confronted them without wavering.

"You just see to it you obey the law yourselves. You can think I'm failing, if you want to. But when a bunch of American citizens think the due processes of the law ain't good enough for them, they ain't such howling successes either."

"How about less preaching and more action?" muttered one.

"Now, you come off it!" retorted Chris, with what for him was heat. "You'll get your action whenever it's right and sensible. But I don't mind tellin' you I'm gettin' tired of a lot of this senseless yappin'."

"When'll that be? — The action, That is."

"Just hold your horses. Things'll work out."

"Now, I call that a hell of an attitude toward a murder!" said the leader of the opposition. "Let things work out by themselves! Well, we want a sheriff that can work things out *himself!*"

"Meanwhile you got me. And I'm tellin' you to leave Loomis alone!" said Chris, and stamped out of there.

But the winter wore on, and still Chris made no move. Loomis sat in his farmhouse, defiant and apparently invulnerable. The community seethed. Men lurched across the snow heaps that bordered the downtown sidewalks to talk to each other in the middle of the ice-rutted streets, their breath coming in clouds of steam that seemed to rise from the temperature of their indignation. It was hard to defend Chris. He all but admitted Loomis's guilt, but he would or could do nothing to bring the law home to him. He wouldn't even talk about it, and got peevish when you tried to make him. His only effort had been to defend the murderer and to put a halter on the energetic members of the community.

As the April elections approached, the opposition made the Loomis case their main issue. The politicians of Chris's party demanded action from him. They demanded that he do *something* — even if meaningless; that he lock up Loomis — even if he had to let him go later. Chris refused, and they disavowed him. It appeared that barring a miracle, Chris's long tenure of office would come to an end.

Sam LaFond, who had been proud to be Chris's right-hand man and had loved to tell in the taverns the inside

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stories of what old Chris thought about this or that local matter — even loyal Sam became hangdog under the jibes and blame heaped on Chris. But when the politicians wanted him to take Chris's place on the party's ticket, Sam flatly refused.

"I been braggin' about Chris all these years, I ain't gonna start runnin' him down now," said Sam.

"But what does he think about it himself?" someone persisted. "Hasn't he got *some* notion in the back of his head?"

Sam shook his head.

"If he has, I don't know about it. He just keeps lookin' out of the window and sayin' he wished the winter was over."

And at long last, with the beginning of April, the thaws came, gradually but inexorably. The white drifts across our yards got a dirty look, and wet edges where they overlapped the shoveled walks. The icicles on the eaves dripped and crashed. The ice rotted at the banks of lake and stream, and cars lurching through the rutted streets sent sheets of dirty water flying to the curbs.

"How's the thaw comin' out in the country?" Chris asked Sam.

"Main road's bare. The creeks and ditches are runnin' full tilt. Ain't started much in the woods yet."

Chris nodded with a benign smile.

Next day was the first really warm day, with a soft and balmy wind that licked up the drifts. The snow sank into last year's dead grass in our lawns. At noon we went out with our overcoats open and our gloves in our pockets. And that evening Chris told Sam and a couple of deputies, "Better get to bed early. I want you to meet me here at 3 o'clock in the morning. Dress warm, and wear your boots."

They looked at him expectantly; but he dismissed them with a nod and a wave, merely adding, "And keep it quiet, boys."

The night was bitter-chill as they drove through the dark to the cheese factory. The dirt road past Loomis's had frozen again, and the ruts of yesterday's traffic were iron hard and jolted the car like corduroy. They parked a piece up the road and walked back, the deputies carrying picks and shovels. And as the first few layers of black peeled off the dark of the night, they settled themselves on stumps at the edge of the woods looking down into Loomis's back lot. Chris had a big thermos jug full of coffee.

"We'll have to wait until it's full light," he said as he poured. "If it ain't thawed enough yet, we'll wait until it has."

Chris let them smoke, and they puffed on their pipes as pink streaks slowly pushed through the gray of the eastern sky. Gradually they made out more detail in Loomis's yard. On the northwest sides of the buildings the snow was still firm, outlining the shapes of last afternoon's shadows; but where the sun had shone full on stubble field and pasture, little remained but a thin crust supported on the tops of the grass, already melted away from the awakening soil below.

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"Snow's sensitive stuff," commented Chris. "For instance, did you ever notice that if you walk on wet snow when it falls, your footprints are the last to melt? Wet snow packs under your weight, and packed snow melts slower'n loose snow."

"Same thing down there," said Sam. "Look at the paths in Loomis's yard."

Chris perked up and looked. Sure enough, a little platform of trampled snow stood before the woodpile; firm little walk-ways of it reached from the back-porch steps to the barn and chicken coop. Chris peered long and hard, and doubt and disappointment showed in his face.

He hunched on his stump and waited.

The sun rose, and the breeze turned warm and warmer. Gradually the anxiety left Chris's face. At length he straightened up and said, "Sam, remember the night Louie disappeared? It snowed good and wet the first few hours."

Sam nodded silently.

"And you remember Loomis's sleigh when we saw it in the shed that night?"

Sam frowned and shook his head.

"There was snow on the runners. It had fallen off the ends and lay there on the dirt floor."

"I remember!"

"So the sleigh was out that night, eh, Sam? — out while the snow was wet, or it wouldn't have packed onto the runners."

Comprehension dawned on Sam's face, and all his old worship of Chris.

"Yeah," said Chris. "We couldn't follow where that sleigh went as long as the snow hid the traces. But now that she's meltin', Sam — take a look!"

Running from Loomis's shed, now, they could plainly see, on the thin and vanishing crust, parallel white lines of stubbornly pressed snow. They stretched across the back lot, through the popple-bar gate, and on across the field, lumpy from the fall plowing. At the next fence they looped back on themselves and returned to the shed.

"Under a fence," muttered Chris, "where nobody'd think nothin' of turned-up earth, and yet no plow would ever quite reach him. And about the last place we'd 'a' searched, with the woods so likely."

Rising, he pointed out to the deputies the winter-old tracks.

"Follow them to where they turn at that fence and start diggin'."

"What you expect to find, Chris?" asked one, just to make sure.

"Whatever Gus hauled out on that sleigh. I'm bettin' my sheriffcy it was Louie's body. And I hope for your sake 't he's still frozen. You and me, Sam, we'll keep Gus company until they're finished. If they find Louie, we'll take him and Gus in together."

And they did.

That's about all there is to tell. Except that Chris Christiansen will be sheriff of Lake County until it snows popcorn.

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Here is the fourth in our series of ten tales of crime, mystery, and detection by Jack London. This time we travel to the South Seas and read about Ah Cho, the impassive, meditative, fatalistic Chinese who slave-labored on a Tahitian cotton plantation for 50 cents Mexican a day. He was only a Chinago, but Jack London himself has reminded us of the old Tahitian proverb: "The coral waxes, the palm grows, but man departs."

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ONLY A CHINAGO

by JACK LONDON

AH CHO DID NOT UNDERSTAND French. He sat in the crowded courtroom, very weary and bored, listening to the unceasing, explosive French that now one official and now another uttered. It was just so much gabble to Ah Cho, and he marveled at the stupidity of the Frenchmen who took so long to find out the murderer of Chung Ga, and who did not find him at all. The 500 coolies on the plantation knew that Ah San had done the killing, and here was Ah San not even arrested. It was true that all the coolies had agreed secretly not to testify against one another; but then, it was so simple, the Frenchmen should have been able to discover that Ah San was the man. They were very stupid, these Frenchmen.

Ah Cho had done nothing of which to be afraid. He had had no hand in the killing. It was true he had been present at it, and Schemmer, the overseer on the plantation, had rushed into the barracks immediately afterward and caught him there, along with the three others; but what of that? Chung Ga had been stabbed only twice. It stood to reason that the four men could not inflict two stab-wounds. At the most, if a man

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had struck but once, only two men could have done it.

So it was that Ah Cho reasoned when he, along with his three companions, had lied and blocked and obfuscated in their statements to the court concerning what had taken place. They had heard the sounds of the killing and, like Schemmer, they had run to the spot. They had got there before Schemmer — that was all. True, Schemmer had testified that, attracted by the sound of quarreling as he chanced to pass by, he had stood for at least five minutes outside; that then, when he entered, he found the prisoners already inside; and that they had not entered just before, because he had been standing by the one door to the barracks. But what of that? Ah Cho and his three fellow-prisoners had testified that Schemmer was mistaken. In the end they would be let go. They were all confident of that. Four men could not have their heads cut off for two stab-wounds. Besides, no foreign devil had seen the killing. But these Frenchmen were so stupid. In China, as Ah Cho well knew, the magistrate would order all of them to the torture and learn the truth. The truth was very easy to learn under torture. But these Frenchmen did not torture — bigger fools they! Therefore they would never find out who killed Chung Ga.

But Ah Cho did not understand everything. The English Company that owned the plantation had imported into Tahiti, at great expense, the 500 coolies, wherefore the Company did not want its costly contract laborers to start the practice of killing one another. Also, there were the French, eager and willing to impose upon the Chinagos the virtues and excellences of French law. There was nothing like setting an example once in a while; and, besides, of what use was New Caledonia except to send men to live out their days in misery and pain in payment of the penalty for being frail and human?

Ah Cho did not understand all this. He sat in the courtroom and waited for the baffled judgment that would set him and his comrades free to go back to the plantation and work out the terms of their contracts. And as he waited he remembered back in his life to the time when he had signed the contract and set sail in the ship for Tahiti. Times had been hard in his seacoast village, and when he indentured himself to labor for five years in the South Seas at 50 cents Mexican a day, he had thought himself fortunate. There were men in his village who toiled a whole year for ten dollars Mexican. And here he was to receive 50 cents a day; for one day, only one day, he was to receive that princely sum! What if the work were hard? At the end of the five years he would return home — that was in the contract — and he would never have to work again. He would be a rich man for life, with a house of his own, a wife, and children growing up to venerate him. Yes, and back of the house he would have a small garden, a place of meditation and repose, with

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goldfish in a tiny lakelet, and windbells tinkling in the several trees, and there would be a high wall all around so that his meditation and repose should be undisturbed.

Well, he had worked out three of those five years. Only two years more intervened between the cotton plantation on Tahiti and the meditation and repose that awaited him. But just now he was losing money because of the unfortunate accident of being present at the killing of Chung Ga. He had lain three weeks in prison, and for each day of those three weeks he had lost 50 cents. But now judgment would soon be given, and he would go back to work.

Ah Cho was twenty-two years old. He was happy and good-natured, and it was easy for him to smile. While his body was slim in the Asiatic way, his face was rotund. It was round, like the moon, and it radiated a gentle complacence and a sweet kindliness of spirit that was unusual among his countrymen. Nor did his looks belie him. He never caused trouble, never took part in wrangling. He did not gamble. His soul was not harsh enough for the soul that must belong to a gambler. He was content with little things and simple pleasures. The hush and quiet in the cool of the day after the blazing toil in the cotton field was to him an infinite satisfaction. He could sit for hours gazing at a solitary flower and philosophizing about the mysteries and riddles of being. A blue heron on a tiny crescent of sandy beach, a silvery splatter of flying fish, or a sunset of pearl and rose across the lagoon, could entrance him to all forgetfulness of the procession of wearisome days and of the heavy lash of Schemmer.

Schemmer, Karl Schemmer, was a brute, a brutish brute. But he earned his salary. He got the last particle of strength out of the 500 slaves; for slaves they were until their term of years was up. Schemmer worked hard to extract the strength from those 500 sweating bodies and to transmute it into bales of fluffy cotton ready for export. He was assisted by a thick leather belt, three inches wide and a yard in length, which on occasion could come down on the naked back of a stooping coolie with a report like a pistol shot. These reports were frequent when Schemmer rode down the furrowed field.

Once, at the beginning of the first year of contract labor, he had killed a coolie with a single blow of his fist. He had not exactly crushed the man's head like an eggshell, but the blow had been sufficient to addle what was inside; and, after being sick for a week, the man had died. But the Chinese had not complained to the French that ruled over Tahiti. Schemmer was their problem. They must avoid his wrath as they avoided the venom of the centipedes that lurked in the grass or crept into the sleeping quarters on rainy nights. The Chinagos — such they were called by the indolent, brown-skinned island folk — saw to it that they did not displease Schemmer too greatly. This was

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equivalent to rendering up to him a full measure of efficient toil. That blow of Schemmer's fist had been worth thousands of dollars to the Company, and no trouble ever came of it to Schemmer.

What matter of the Chinago that died? Besides, he died of sunstroke, as the doctor's certificate attested. True, in all the history of Tahiti no one had ever died of sunstroke. But it was that, precisely that, which made the death of this Chinago unique. The doctor said as much in his report.

There was no understanding these white devils. Ah Cho pondered their inscrutableness as he sat in the court-room waiting the judgment. There was no telling what went on at the back of their minds. They were all alike — the officers and sailors on the ship, the officials, the several white men on the plantation, including Schemmer. They grew angry without apparent cause, and their anger was always dangerous. They were like wild beasts at such times. A Chinago never knew when an act would please them or arouse a storm of wrath. And then, on top of it all, was their terrible efficiency, that ability to make things go, to work results, to bend to their wills all creeping, crawling things, and the powers of the very elements themselves. Yes, the white men were strange and wonderful, and they were devils.

Ah Cho wondered why the judgment was so long in forming. Not a man on trial had laid hand on Chung Ga. Ah San alone had killed him. Ah San had done it, bending Chung Ga's head back with one hand by a grip of his queue, and with the other hand, from behind, reaching over and driving the knife into his body. Twice had he driven it in. There in the court-room, with closed eyes, Ah Cho saw the killing acted over again — the squabble, the vile words bandied back and forth, the filth and insult flung upon venerable ancestors, the curses laid upon unbegotten generations, the leap of Ah San, the grip on the queue of Chung Ga, the knife that sank twice into his flesh, the bursting open of the door, the irruption of Schemmer, the dash for the door, the escape of Ah San, the flying belt of Schemmer that drove the rest into the corner, and the firing of the revolver as a signal that brought help to Schemmer. Ah Cho shivered as he lived it over. One blow of the belt had bruised his cheek, taking off some of the skin. Schemmer had pointed to the bruises when, on the witness-stand, he had identified Ah Cho. It was only just now that the marks had become no longer visible. That had been a blow. Half an inch nearer the centre and it would have taken out his eye.

Then Ah Cho forgot the whole happening in a vision he caught of the garden of meditation and repose that would be his when he returned to his own land.

He sat with impassive face while the magistrate rendered the judgment. Likewise were the faces of his three

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companions impassive. And they remained impassive when the interpreter explained that the four of them had been found guilty of the murder of Chung Ga, and that Ah Chow should have his head cut off, Ah Cho serve twenty years in prison in New Caledonia, Wong Li twelve years, and Ah Tong ten years. There was no use in getting excited about it. Even Ah Chow remained expressionless as a mummy, though it was his head that was to be cut off. The magistrate added a few words; and the interpreter explained that Ah Chow's face, severely bruised by Schemmer's strap, had made his identification so positive that, since one man must die, he might as well be that man. Also, the fact that Ah Cho's face likewise had been bruised conclusively proving his presence at the murder and his undoubted participation, had merited him the twenty years of penal servitude. And down to the ten years of Ah Tong, the proportioned reason for each sentence was explained. Let the Chinagos take the lesson to heart, the Court said finally, for they must learn that the law would be fulfilled in Tahiti though the heavens fell.

The four Chinagos were taken back to jail. They were not shocked nor grieved. The heavy punishment for a crime they had not committed was no stranger than the countless strange things that white devils did.

In the weeks that followed, Ah Cho often contemplated Ah Chow with mild curiosity. His head was to be cut off by the guillotine that was being erected on the plantation. For Ah Chow there would be no declining years, no gardens of tranquillity. As for himself, he was not perturbed. Twenty years were merely twenty years. By that much was his garden removed from him — that was all. He thought of a name for it; he would call it The Garden of the Morning Calm. He was made happy all day by the thought, and he was inspired to devise a moral maxim on the virtue of patience which proved a great comfort, especially to Wong Li and Ah Tong. Ah Chow, however, did not care for Ah Cho's maxim. Ah Chow's head was to be separated from his body in so short a time that he had no need for patience to wait for that event. He smoked well, ate well, slept well, and did not worry about the slow passage of time.

Cruchot was a gendarme. He knew discipline and fear of authority, and between God and the sergeant of gendarmes the only difference was the measure of slavish obedience which he rendered. In point of fact, the sergeant bulked bigger in Cruchot's mind than God, except on Sundays. God was usually very remote, while the sergeant was ordinarily very close at hand.

Cruchot it was who received the order from the Chief Justice to the jailer, commanding that functionary to deliver over to Cruchot the person of Ah Chow. Now, it happened that the Chief Justice had given a dinner the night before to the captain and officers of the French man-of-war.

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His hand was shaking when he wrote out the order, and his eyes were aching so dreadfully that he did not read over the order. So he did not notice that he had omitted the final letter in Ah Chow's name. The order read "Ah Cho," and when Cruchot presented the order, the jailer turned over to him the person of Ah Cho. Cruchot took that person beside him on the seat of a wagon, behind two mules, and drove away.

Ah Cho was glad to be out in the sunshine. He sat beside the gendarme and beamed. He beamed more ardently than ever when he noted the mules headed south toward Atimaono. Undoubtedly Schemmer had sent for him to be brought back. Schemmer wanted him to work. Very well, he would work well. Schemmer would never have cause to complain. It was a hot day. There had been a stoppage of the trade winds. The mules sweated, Cruchot sweated, and Ah Cho sweated. But it was Ah Cho that bore the heat with the least concern. He had toiled three years under that sun on the plantation. He beamed and beamed with such genial good nature that even Cruchot's heavy mind was stirred to wonderment.

"You are very funny," he said at last.

Ah Cho nodded and beamed more ardently. Unlike the magistrate, Cruchot spoke to him in the Kanaka tongue, and this Ah Cho understood.

"You laugh too much," Cruchot chided. "One's heart should be full of tears on a day like this."

"I am glad to get out of the jail."

"Is that all?" The gendarme shrugged.

"Is it not enough?"

"Then you are not glad to have your head cut off?"

Ah Cho looked at him in abrupt perplexity and said, "Why, I am going back to Atimaono to work on the plantation for Schemmer. Are you not taking me to Atimaono?"

Cruchot stroked his long mustaches reflectively. "Well, well," he said finally, with a flick of the whip at the off-mule, "so you don't know?"

"Know what?" Ah Cho was beginning to feel a vague alarm. "Won't Schemmer let me work for him any more?"

"Not after today." Cruchot laughed heartily. "You see, you won't be able to work after today. A man with his head off can't work, eh?" He poked the Chinago in the ribs and chuckled.

Ah Cho maintained silence while the mules trotted a hot mile. Then he spoke: "Is Schemmer going to cut off my head?"

Cruchot nodded.

"It is a mistake," said Ah Cho, gravely. "I am not the Chinago that is to have his head cut off. I am Ah Cho. The honorable judge has determined that I am to stop twenty years in New Caledonia."

The gendarme laughed. It was a good joke, this funny Chinago trying to cheat the guillotine. The mules trotted through a cocoanut grove and for half a mile beside the sparkling sea before Ah Cho spoke again.

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"I tell you I am not Ah Chow. The honorable judge did not say that my head was to go off."

"Don't be afraid," said Cruchot, with the philanthropic intention of making it easier for his prisoner. "It is not difficult to die that way." He snapped his fingers. "It is quick — like that. It is not like hanging on the end of a rope and kicking and making faces for five minutes. It is like killing a chicken with a hatchet. You cut its head off, that is all. And it is the same with a man. Pouf! — it is over. It doesn't hurt. You don't even think it hurts. Your head is gone, so you cannot think. That is the way I want to die — quick, ah, quick. You are lucky to die that way. You might get the leprosy and fall to pieces slowly, a finger at a time, and now and again a thumb, also the toes. I knew a man who was burned by hot water. It took him two days to die. You could hear him yelling a kilometre away. But you? Ah! so easy! Chck! — the knife cuts your neck like that. It is finished. The knife may even tickle. Who can say? Nobody who died that way ever came back to say."

He considered this last an excruciating joke and permitted himself to be convulsed with laughter for half a minute. Part of his mirth was assumed, but he considered it his humane duty to cheer up the Chinago.

"But I tell you I am Ah Cho," the other persisted. "I don't want my head cut off."

Cruchot scowled. The Chinago was carrying the foolishness too far.

"I am not Ah Chow —" Ah Cho began.

"That will do," the gendarme interrupted. He puffed up his cheeks and strove to appear fierce.

"I tell you I am not —" Ah Cho began again.

"Shut up!" bawled Cruchot.

After that they rode along in silence. It was twenty miles from Papeete to Atimaono, and over half the distance was covered by the time the Chinago again ventured into speech.

"I saw you in the courtroom, when the honorable judge sought after our guilt," he began. "Very good. And do you remember that Ah Chow, whose head is to be cut off — do you remember that he — Ah Chow — was a tall man? Look at me."

He stood up suddenly, and Cruchot saw that he was a short man. And just as suddenly Cruchot caught a glimpse of a memory picture of Ah Chow, and in that picture Ah Chow was tall. To the gendarme all Chinagos looked alike. One face was like another. But between tallness and shortness he could differentiate, and he knew that he had the wrong man beside him on the seat. He pulled up the mules abruptly, so that the pole shot ahead of them, elevating their collars.

"You see, it was a mistake," said Ah Cho, smiling pleasantly.

But Cruchot was thinking. Already he regretted that he had stopped the wagon. He was unaware of the error of the Chief Justice and he had no way of working it out; but he did know that he had been given this

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Chinago to take to Atimaono and that it was his duty to take him to Atimaono. Besides, it might not be a mistake. He did not know what went on in the minds of his superiors. They knew their business best. Who was he to do their thinking for them? Once, in the long ago, he had attempted to think for them, and the sergeant had said: "Cruchot, you are a fool! The quicker you know that, the better you will get on. You are not to think; you are to obey and leave thinking to your betters." He smarted under the recollection. Also, if he turned back to Papeete, he would delay the execution at Atimaono, and if he were wrong in turning back he would get a reprimand from the sergeant who was waiting for the prisoner. And, furthermore, he would get a reprimand at Papeete as well.

He touched the mules with the whip and drove on. He looked at his watch. He would be half an hour late as it was, and the sergeant was bound to be angry. He put the mules into a faster trot. The more Ah Cho persisted in explaining the mistake, the more stubborn Cruchot became. The knowledge that he had the wrong man did not make his temper better. The knowledge that it was through no mistake of his confirmed him in the belief that the wrong he was doing was the right. And, rather than incur the displeasure of the sergeant, he would willingly have assisted a dozen wrong Chinagos to their doom.

As for Ah Cho, after the gendarme had struck him over the head with the butt of the whip and commanded him in a loud voice to shut up, there remained nothing for him to do but to shut up. The long ride continued in silence. Ah Cho pondered the strange ways of the foreign devils. There was no explaining them. What they were doing with him was of a piece with everything they did. First they found guilty four innocent men, and next they cut off the head of the man that even they, in their benighted ignorance, had deemed meritorious of no more than twenty years' imprisonment. And there was nothing he could do. He could only sit idly and take what these lords of life measured out to him. Once he got in a panic, and the sweat upon his body turned cold; but he fought his way out of it. He endeavored to resign himself to his fate by remembering and repeating certain passages from the *Yin Chih Wen* (*The Tract of the Quiet Way*); but, instead, he kept seeing his dream-garden of meditation and repose. This bothered him, until he abandoned himself to the dream and sat in his garden listening to the tinkling of the wind-bells in the several trees. And lo! sitting thus, in the dream, he was able to remember and repeat the passages from *The Tract of the Quiet Way*.

So the time passed nicely until Atimaono was reached and the mules trotted up to the foot of the scaffold, in the shade of which stood the impatient sergeant. Ah Cho was hurried up the ladder of the scaffold. Beneath him on one side he saw assembled all

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the coolies of the plantation. Schemmer had decided that the event would be a good object-lesson, and so had called in the coolies from the fields and compelled them to be present. As they caught sight of Ah Cho they gabbled among themselves in low voices. They saw the mistake; but they kept it to themselves. The inexplicable white devils had doubtlessly changed their minds. Instead of taking the life of one innocent man, they were taking the life of another innocent man. Ah Chow or Ah Cho — what did it matter which? Ah Cho was going to have his head cut off; but they, when their two remaining years of servitude were up, were going back to China.

Schemmer had made the guillotine himself. He was a handy man, and though he had never seen a guillotine, the French officials had explained the principle to him. It was on his suggestion that they had ordered the execution to take place at Atimaono instead of at Papeete. The scene of the crime, Schemmer had argued, was the best possible place for the punishment; — in addition, it would have a salutary influence upon the half-thousand Chinagos on the plantation.

Schemmer had also volunteered to act as executioner, and in that capacity he was now on the scaffold, experimenting with the instrument he had made. A banana tree, of the size and consistency of a man's neck, lay under the guillotine. Ah Cho watched with fascinated eyes. The German, turning a small crank, hoisted the blade to the top of the little derrick he had rigged. A jerk on a stout piece of cord loosed the blade and it dropped with a flash, neatly severing the banana trunk.

"How does it work?" The sergeant asked the question.

"Beautifully," was Schemmer's exultant answer. "Let me show you."

Again he turned the crank that hoisted the blade, jerked the cord, and sent the blade crashing down on the soft tree. But this time it went no more than two-thirds of the way through.

The sergeant scowled. "That will not serve," he said.

Schemmer wiped the sweat from his forehead. "What it needs is more weight." Walking up to the edge of the scaffold, he called his orders to the blacksmith for a twenty-five-pound piece of iron. As he stooped to attach the iron to the broad top of the blade, Ah Cho glanced at the sergeant and saw his opportunity.

"The honorable judge said that Ah Chow was to have his head cut off," he began.

The sergeant nodded impatiently. He was thinking of the fifteen-mile ride before him that afternoon to the windward side of the island, and of Berthe, the pretty half-caste daughter of Lafière, the pearl-trader, who was waiting for him at the end of it.

"Well, I am not Ah Chow. I am Ah Cho. The honorable jailer has made a mistake. Ah Chow is a tall man, and you see I am short."

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The sergeant looked at him hastily and saw the mistake. "Schemmer!" he called, imperatively. "Come here."

The German grunted, but remained bent over his task till the chunk of iron was lashed to his satisfaction. "Is your Chinago ready?" he demanded.

"Look at him," was the answer. "Is he the Chinago?"

Schemmer was surprised. He swore tersely for a few seconds and looked regretfully across at the thing he had made with his own hands and which he was eager to see work. "Look here," he said finally, "we can't postpone this affair. I've lost three hours' work already out of those five hundred Chinagos. I can't afford to lose it all over again. It is only a Chinago."

The sergeant remembered the long ride before him, and the pearl-trader's daughter, and debated with himself.

"They will blame it on Cruchot — if it is discovered," the German urged. "But there's little chance of its being discovered. Ah Chow won't give it away, at any rate."

"The blame won't lie with Cruchot, anyway," the sergeant said. "It must have been the jailer's mistake."

"Then let's go on with it. They can't blame us. Who can tell one Chinago from another? We can say that we merely carried out instructions with the Chinago that was turned over to us. Besides, I really can't take all those coolies a second time away from their labor."

They spoke in French. Ah Cho, who did not understand a word of it, nevertheless knew that they were determining his destiny. He knew, also, that the decision rested with the sergeant, and he hung upon that official's lips.

"All right," announced the sergeant. "Go ahead with it."

"I'm going to try it once more, just to make sure." Schemmer moved the banana trunk forward under the knife, which he had hoisted to the top of the derrick.

Ah Cho tried to remember maxims from *The Tract of the Quiet Way.* "Live in concord," came to him; but it was not applicable. He was not going to live. He was about to die. No, that would not do. "Forgive malice" — yes, but there was no malice to forgive. Schemmer and the rest were doing this thing without malice. It was to them merely a piece of work that had to be done, just as clearing the jungle, ditching the water, and planting cotton were pieces of work that had to be done. Schemmer jerked the cord, and Ah Cho forgot *The Tract of the Quiet Way.* The knife shot down with a thud, making a clean slice of the tree.

"Beautiful!" exclaimed the sergeant, pausing in the act of lighting a cigarette. "Beautiful, my friend."

Schemmer was pleased at the praise.

"Come on, Ah Chow," he said, in the Tahitian tongue.

"But I am not Ah Chow —" Ah Cho began.

"Shut up!" was the answer. "If you open your mouth again, I'll break your head."

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The overseer threatened him with a clenched fist, and Ah Cho remained silent. What was the good of protesting? He allowed himself to be lashed to the vertical board that was the size of his body. Schemmer drew the buckles tight — so tight that the straps cut into his flesh and hurt. But he did not complain. The hurt would not last long. He felt the board tilting and closed his eyes. And in that moment he caught a last glimpse of his garden of meditation and repose. It seemed to him that he sat in the garden. A cool wind was blowing, and the bells in the several trees were tinkling softly. Also, birds were making sleepy noises, and from beyond the high wall came the subdued sound of village life.

Then he was aware that the board had come to rest, and from muscular pressures and tensions he knew that he was lying on his back. He opened his eyes. Straight above him he saw the suspended knife blazing in the sunshine. He saw the weight which had been added, and noted that one of Schemmer's knots had slipped. Then he heard the sergeant's voice in sharp command. Ah Cho closed his eyes hastily. He did not want to see that knife descend. But he felt it — for one great fleeting instant. And in that instant he remembered Cruchot and what Cruchot had said. But Cruchot was wrong. The knife did not tickle. That much he knew before he ceased to know.

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Inspector Chafik solves the case of the Sumerian Chalice — with the help of the Baghdad Street Irregulars

THE ARMY OF LITTLE EARS

by CHARLES B. CHILD

CHAFIK J. CHAFIK, OF THE BAGHdad police, took his place at the breakfast table in his house on the Street of the Scatterer of Blessings. The swarthy, neat little man, dressed for the heat of the day in immaculate whites, accepted the homage of his family with the indulgence of a Babylonian king. He glanced at his watch, announced, "I am four minutes late," and dipped his spoon into the bowl of *liben* and honey-colored dates.

Leila, his wife, a serene and graceful woman, asked, "My man, you did not sleep well?"

She glanced at her son, a wide-eyed elf of a boy, and saw that his effervescence was precariously corked. Her look constrained him.

Chafik said, "The Compassionate One willed me a bad night. There were comings and goings and voices, and the most objectionable voice was the voice of a cat." He looked at his son reprovingly.

Faisal began, "My father —"

Leila interrupted: "Faisal's cat had kittens."

"Five," the boy said proudly. "May I keep them? May I, my father?"

It was difficult for Chafik to deny his son anything, but he was incensed by his sleepless night. He sighed. "Ah, what base ingratitude!" he said. "I took this animal into my house as a homeless waif and —"

He stopped, for he suddenly remembered that Faisal had been a waif, too. It was less than two years since the boy, then an eight-year-old orphan, had been one of the pack of homeless urchins who frequented the Baghdad bazaars. Chafik had taken him from that life to fill the gap in a childless, but otherwise happy, marriage, and had never regretted the impulse which had given him a fine son.

So, shocked by his unfortunate remark, the little man looked beseechingly at his wife.

Leila's head was lowered; she said nothing.

Chafik took refuge in attack. "Does not my sleepless night suffice?" he demanded. "Am I now denied the brightness of conversation? And must I have kittens underfoot, too?"

The telephone rang, and the Inspector padded on stocking feet to answer it. The caller was Sergeant Abdullah of the homicide squad.

Abdullah said in a voice of doom,

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"Sir, I trust you have enjoyed breakfast?"

"My stomach," Chafik answered, "is delicate this morning, and judging by your ill-omened croak it is well I left it unfilled. What horror have you to show me?"

"I regret, sir, a corpse." The sergeant went on to give details.

When Abdullah had finished, Chafik got his shoes from under the hall table, for Arab-fashion he did not wear them in the house. He picked up the shoes and returned to his family.

"The evil continues," he said. "Now I have a corpse. They found one on the premises of Mr. Topalian, the jeweler and antique dealer of the bazaars. And Mr. Topalian has vanished. Enough, therefore, of ungrateful cats and pestiliential kittens. Respect my wishes and cast them out."

Faisal's wail followed Chafik to the street. The Inspector sought comfort in the wisdom of the Koran, and prayerfully hoped his thoughtless remark, which had distressed his wife, had escaped the notice of their adopted son. Knowing the sharpness of those faunlike ears, he was not sure.

"If the Devil had not given us speech, there would be less misunderstanding in the world," the little man said, as he drove away.

The establishment of David Topalian was in one of the far reaches of the great bazaar. Inspector Chafik, who had left his car outside the Imperial Bank, where the labyrinth of covered ways began, arrived on foot, and was received by the tall police officer who had telephoned.

Abdullah said, "Sir, the corpse is that of a man named Esiah Constantine. He —"

Chafik gestured for silence, extracted a record card from his tidy brain, and quoted: "Constantine, Esiah. Aged fifty-seven. Resident of Basra. Educated. Assisted in the archeological excavations at Ur in the nineteen-twenties." He paused and then added, "Believed to be in possession of valuable antiques — allegedly he stole them from the excavations. I will now face his corpse."

They went down a short passage into a vaulted room, cool and shadowy, and brightened by silk prayer rugs on the walls. There were many treasures in the place, which was an exotic setting for the colorful Armenian dealer who normally presided over it in a velvet gown and embroidered skullcap. But Topalian did not preside today, and the corpse of Esiah Constantine was not exotic.

The body was sprawled in a low chair with its head bowed on an ebony coffee table. Two cups, which had been used, were overturned, and drunken flies crawled over the pool of sugary coffee. The back of the dead man's skull was crushed; on the floor was a bronze club shaped like a lion's paw.

Inspector Chafik looked at the club and said, "Ancient Assyrian — a warrior's weapon. Mr. Topalian has a large collection of such relics."

He examined the body, touched the

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mashed head, noticed splinters of protruding bone, and announced, "The killer stood on the right, possibly after pouring coffee to honor — and disarm — the guest. Three blows were struck. Wasteful energy; one was enough."

Sergeant Abdullah said, "Sir, the man has been dead some nine hours. It fits the time of Topalian's departure. He —"

Chafik wiped his hands on the coat-tails of the corpse. "Let us begin at the end, as detective stories are written," he said. "Who found Constantine?"

"The missing man's cousin, sir. George Topalian. I will produce him."

The sergeant brought in a handsome young man whose heavy-lidded eyes suggested that he kept late hours. He was nervous, and the ash of many cigarettes was spilled on his expensive, but crumpled, clothes.

"A candle that burns at both ends should at least gut itself neatly," Chafik said. "However, that is not my affair. Your name is George Topalian. You are twenty-three, unmarried, but not inexperienced. You work for your cousin, who is thirty years your senior. You discovered the unfortunate gentleman who lies here. Inform me of the circumstances."

The young man would not look at the body as he answered, "My cousin expects me to open the shop at 7:30, but I was perhaps half an hour late this morning. The door was still locked —"

Chafik interrupted: "Your cousin has a residence in the Jenub district; he also has a sleeping room above these premises. You feared he had stayed the night and would reprimand you for lateness?"

George Topalian's handsome face became sullen. He nodded.

"So you knocked?"

"There are witnesses. Neighbors —"

"They will talk later. With diffidence toward an elder, you knocked, and there was no answer. Then?"

"I unlocked the door and went in. I saw Constantine."

"You knew him?"

"I knew of him — that he was coming from Basra to sell something."

"What?"

"A chalice. The funeral cup of a Sumerian noble."

Chafik thought: So my records are correct — Constantine did steal treasures on that expedition years ago. Now he tries to sell them. And to what better dealer could he go than David Topalian?

Aloud, the Inspector said, "The killer apparently took the chalice away. I need a description."

The young man shrugged and answered disdainfully, "I can't help you. I care little about antiques; I like modern things. But any collector can describe the chalice; they all knew Constantine had it."

Chafik was disturbed because his records had missed this important fact, but he said, "So when you found the body, you ran for help?"

"First I went to see if my cousin was upstairs."

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"Thereby establishing that nobody was hiding on the premises. Excellently done!" Chafik took out a packet of Ghazi cigarettes and offered one to the witness. "Now, your cousin's disappearance. When did you last see him?"

Topalian lighted the cigarette from the Inspector's match and answered, "Last night, about 8 o'clock. We were closing. He told me to get porters for a customer's purchase."

"Several porters means a bulky object," Chafik said. "Was it the object that formerly stood outside in the entrance passage? I noticed a portion of lighter-colored floor. Observation is the fetish of my trade," he added apologetically.

"You observed correctly. It was a Meccan bridal chest. I found porters, escorted them to the purchaser's home, saw delivery made, left —"

"Wait," Chafik said. "I cannot stand on the curve of time and see all dimensions at once. Had the customer departed before you went for the porters?"

"Yes."

"And your cousin was here when you returned?"

"He had gone upstairs to rest and to wait for Constantine. I did not disturb him. Furthermore, I was in a hurry."

Chafik detected evasion in the young man's reply, so he asked with deceptive mildness, "You had an engagement, perhaps?"

Topalian stared down at his cigarette; his heavy lids concealed the expression in his eyes. "I was to meet a friend," he said.

"For the sake of tidy records, give me his name."

"We — he — we were to meet at the Shahrazade Cabaret. No, it was the Roxy. But he didn't turn up. I—" He stopped abruptly.

The Inspector would not let his confusion pass. "The sequence of events may refresh your memory," he said. "To whom did you take the chest?"

"To Dr. Ghaffari."

"Ghaffari, Mohammed," Chafik quoted. "Aged sixty-two. Ph.D. from London University. He buys antiques rather than food." The little man smiled, then asked, "At what time did you make the delivery?"

"I — I don't remember."

"Be at ease, the doctor will remember. You see, I try to help you," Chafik said kindly.

"Ghaffari wasn't at home. He had an appointment, too. Before he left my cousin's shop he gave me a key."

"You were in the doctor's house alone after you dismissed the porters?"

"For a few minutes. Why the Devil do you ask so many questions?" the young man asked angrily.

"How timely to mention the Devil! He was busy here, directing Constantine's murder, the disappearance of the chalice, the disappearance of your cousin —"

George Topalian interrupted vehemently, "Now you implicate my cousin!"

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"I have made no accusation, yet. How much was he to pay for the chalice?"

"I don't know. He complained that the price was high, but he hoped to get it lowered. Besides, he had a buyer, an American — they are all foolish about antiques. So why should he kill?"

"An eloquent defense," Chafik said. "Let us, however, be factual and consider only the facts of his disappearance. Who saw Mr. Topalian last?"

The inquiry was addressed to the Inspector's assistant, who brought in a very old man clad in tattered battle dress.

Sergeant Abdullah said, "The next witness, sir. Shah Murad, the bazaar *charkachi*. Formerly of the Levise."

Chafik noticed with pity how the watchman strained to come to attention. "Did he see Constantine arrive?" he asked Abdullah.

"His evidence is that he saw the deceased admitted to these premises. Half an hour later, he states, Topalian left in a great hurry. Murad claims he saw him turn the corner into the Street of the Coppersmiths. Since then so far as I can ascertain, no eyes have beheld the Armenian."

"What was Topalian wearing?"

"The robe he favors, sir. Also a hat with a brim, such as Christians wear."

Chafik said dryly, "An odd costume for a man who planned to disappear."

The Inspector went outside. The bazaar was roofed by straw mats which were rotted by the weather; sunlight and shadow made an intricate pattern over the unpaved way. The Street of the Coppersmiths was entered through a narrow arch a few yards from Topalian's shop.

The street was a place of thunderous noise and of sudden, leaping flames that brushed the workers at their forges with glowing color. Numerous passages, barely wide enough for a man on foot, led into mysterious reaches. Chafik shrugged, knowing the hopelessness of searching such a maze.

"Human tigers prowl this jungle at night," Chafik said. "If it were known that Topalian carried an object of value —" He finished the thought with a finger across his throat.

"A body," the sergeant said thoughtfully, "is difficult to hide."

"Its presence," the Inspector agreed, "would become evident in this heat in two days. In three days," he amended, flinching from the odors of the open drains. "You will instruct the police to alert their noses."

"That will be done, sir. But what of Constantine?"

"Yes. Constantine. The discovery of a dead Topalian would not answer the quesions raised by the corpse he left behind."

The little man stopped, stared at the corner of the Street of the Coppersmiths, and ran. He was blocked by the crowd that had been attracted by rumors of murder.

"I swear I saw him!" Chafik exclaimed to Abdullah.

"Mr. Topalian, sir?"

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"No. Faisal — my son. He should be at school."

"Boys look very much alike, sir, and there are many in the bazaar. They rush this way and that with great energy. It is the way of boys. I have daughters," the sergeant added smugly.

"Daughters undulate," Chafik said. And then, unhappily, he remembered the episode of the cat and kittens and his unfortunate remark at the breakfast table. He hurried back to the antique shop to call his wife.

"Leila," he began.

"Oh, my man!" There was relief in her voice. "You got my message?" his wife went on.

"What message? I am closeted with an uncommunicative corpse."

"I called your office to inform you that Faisal's school —"

"Yes? Yes? What, my wife?"

"They have reported he did not attend this morning."

Chafik was shocked and silent. He wanted to rush home, but duty restrained him and it was necessary to reassure Leila.

"A childish prank, my wife. I shall discipline Faisal," he added sternly. "Inform him, when he comes home, that his father will not speak to him for twenty-four hours." And with fond words for Leila, the Inspector hung up.

Then he beat his fists together and exclaimed, "All because of the cat. That monster and her kittens!"

"Sir?" Abdullah asked.

"Nothing, nothing." The Inspector sought escape in action. "I am going to Dr. Ghaffari, who perhaps can describe the object Constantine brought to Topalian. I assume he, like all collectors, knows about it," Chafik added. "As for yourself, check on the cousin. That young man's alibi was unsatisfactory. And, Abdullah —"

"Sir?"

"If you should see my son, reprimand him severely and send him home. He does not belong here, not in the bazaars, not now."

The man the Inspector wished to see lived at the back of the bazaars, in a house that thrust its ancient foundations into the river's slime. It was once a Turkish palace but now housed many families; Ghaffari had rooms on the first floor.

As Chafik picked his way through the refuse of the streets, he had a feeling that he was being followed, and he looked around. He saw nobody suspicious, and was distracted by a boy who resembled Faisal.

The urchin wore a ragged gown and a wisp of turban. He skipped blithely on naked feet, balancing a basket on his head; light portering was the precarious livelihood of these waifs, hired for a few *fils*.

They grow up to become entries in my criminal records, Chafik thought sadly. This might have been Faisal.

The youngster passed, then twirled, like a ballet dancer, across the Inspector's path. He had a sharp, bright face, too-wise eyes, and an engaging smile. "Sahib?" he said.

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"I am not shopping," Chafik said. "And I have nothing to carry." He reached into his pocket for a coin.

The urchin ran backward before him. "Policeman Sahib, I am not to take money. I have a message."

Chafik stopped.

"I am to say that yesterday the Armenian merchant, Topalian, and his cousin, quarreled. About women. The young one has many women. The elder threatend to banish the younger from Baghdad, unless —"

"Who sent you?" Chafik demanded. "How do you know I am a policeman?"

The boy did a pirouette, kicked up his heels, laughed, and disappeared.

"Was it Abdullah?" Chafik wondered, as he walked on. "No, he would never send such a message by a seedling! So who?"

At Dr. Ghaffari's house, he rattled the heavy knocker.

The doctor was a tall, stooped man who peered at the Inspector with tired, sunken eyes. His clothes were threadbare, but he had gracious manners and bowed as he recognized his visitor.

"I am honored, Inspector! Come in, come in! If I had known of your visit I would have prepared coffee."

"I am on duty, Doctor." Chafik was well aware Ghaffari had no coffee in the house. To save money for antiques, the doctor bought the dross that merchants scraped from their sacks.

Ghaffari lived in three large rooms which opened off the entrance hall. Light came grayly through barred windows and touched the treasures that crowded every corner. The man had once been wealthy, but now his dinars were interred in this magnificent collection.

Chafik said, "I have come for help. You know about Topalian?"

"Yes, I heard. It's incredible. I saw him yesterday and he was in fine spirits and happy about an important deal. I cannot believe —"

The Inspector was in a hurry and stopped Ghaffari. "I am informed the deal concerned an antique which Constantine brought from Basra. It has vanished. Did you know of it? Can you describe it?"

"Can a man describe Paradise?" Ghaffari's eyes shone, and color touched his sallow cheeks. He went to a cabinet and reverently lifted a crystal cup which filled his two hands like a bowl of light.

"This," he said, "is Sumerian craftsmanship, but compared with the chalice you ask about, it is clay. The chalice is of this size and shape and made from a block of lapis lazuli worked so fine it shames an eggshell. Yet it is strong; gold is fused with the lapis. And the color! The sun-flecked blue of the canopy of God's Throne!"

"It would appear you have seen the cup," Chafik said.

"Constantine showed it to me in Basra years ago."

"So it is true then that he hid it from his superiors when they excavated the death pits at Ur?"

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Ghaffari shrugged. "Who can blame him? But permit me to continue. The chalice is a funeral cup. When a Sumerian noble was buried, they put a cup filled with rare wine in his hands. And round about him were guards and attendants —"

"Slaughtered," said Chafik, "to attend their master's afterworld comforts. It is well I was not a policeman in those days. What value do you put on the chalice?"

"Value? You mean money? Inspector, one does not estimate such a treasure in dinars! I was shocked when Topalian said Constantine was going to sell. I had thought better of him."

Chafik was puzzled. The chalice was so rare that a warning circulated among the police of all countries would frighten away all prospective buyers. "And so," the Inspector said, "Constantine's murderer must be aware that if he tries to sell, he will be paid by the hangman."

The doctor insisted on showing his collection and Chafik went politely from room to room. He was overwhelmed by the beauty he saw, and he felt pity for the man, living in poverty amid such wealth.

When they returned to the hall, the Inspector examined a large chest and asked Ghaffari if he had bought it from Topalian. The doctor nodded, raised the heavy lid, and launched into a discourse.

"I believe this dates to the Queen of Sheba," he said. "The painted designs are Meccan, but there are traces of others underneath. However, the years have taken their toll, and perhaps I did not get a good bargain."

He pointed to cracks in the side of the chest and then let the lid fall. It closed like a slammed door and wafted odors of myrrh and frankincense into the room.

"I am told," Chafik said, "that young Topalian delivered this in your absence. You considered it safe to trust him with the key to your house?"

Ghaffari said, "I know the young man well and have always found him exemplary, except for —"

"Women?" Chafik suggested. They both smiled.

As he prepared to go, the Inspector asked, "Doctor, when you returned, did you find the chest open?"

"Open? Let me think." Ghaffari turned and looked at it. "Yes — yes, I am sure I found it open."

The little man salaamed and left. On the doorstep he threw down the stub of his cigarette, and, looking back a moment later, saw Ghaffari pick it up.

So he also denies himself the comfort of tobacco, thought Chafik. Surely the Compassionate One has afflicted him.

Anxious to telephone his wife for news of Faisal, he walked rapidly, and it was some time before he realized that a bazaar boy was running after him. He stopped, turned quickly, and the boy just as quickly backed away.

"Sahib! A message!"

"Another?" Chafik asked.

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"Sahib, Hassan Ali, the beggar of the Street of the Leatherworkers, yesterday boasted he would rob the Armenian, Topalian."

The Inspector reached for the boy, and clutched air. The boy was as elusive as smoke. Bewildered, Chafik continued on his way.

"There is organization behind this," he told himself. "Only the All-Merciful knows if the intention is to hinder or help."

As if he had been sent in answer, a third boy appeared from nowhere with the same breathless "Sahib?"

"Deliver your message," Chafik said with resignation.

"I am to tell you to forget about Hassan Ali. After he boasted, he fell down drunk from drinking much arrack, and slept all night."

"I thank you," Chafik said. "The original rumor would have reached me on a police report and would have caused tribulation for both Hassan Ali and myself until the truth was known. Therefore I am grateful to whoever directs you, fleet-footed Father of Long Ears."

And courteously saluting the grinning urchin, he turned and left.

There was no news of Faisal. Inspector Chafik stood at the window of his office overlooking Al Rashid Street, and saw in the ugly, brown city the reflection of his mood. Somewhere among those half million people of all races and creeds was his son.

He reproached himself bitterly. Now he was sure Faisal had misunderstood the remark about the stray cat, had remembered that he had once been a homeles waif and, believing himself unwanted, had run away.

But I cannot divert men to find him, Chafik thought despairingly. I am a policeman. There is murder.

Sergeant Abdullah came in. He was as emotional as the stone image he resembled, and was excellent therapy for the distracted father.

In his usual ominous voice, Abdullah said, "Sir, I have checked the alibi of the younger Topalian. He lied. He was not at any cabaret. Nor did he go home last night. And, sir, by careful inquiry I have learned that yesterday he —"

"Quarreled with his cousin about a woman," Chafik said.

"A fierce and wordy argument. But, sir, how did you know?"

"I have ears, many little ears. You re-examined Topalian?"

"He is stubbornly silent and refuses to detail his movements after he delivered the chest. I have detained him."

"Did you establish how long he stayed alone in Dr. Ghaffari's house?"

"There are no witnesses, sir. The porters departed immediately."

Chafik looked down at the signet ring on his left hand. "What else, Abdullah?" he asked, absently.

"One of those miserable urchins who frequent the bazaars —"

"I adopted one," Chafik said softly.

Abdullah went on, blushing, "The waif commanded me to tell you that four days ago Dr. Ghaffari purchased

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a chain and iron collar, suitable for a large dog. I could not detain my informant."

"It would be easier to catch a gazelle. These young messengers are bombarding me with wild rumors. Ghaffari has no dog. Yet, I wonder — I wonder."

The Inspector looked at his watch. "So late? I am going home. Continue to press the search for the elder Topalian. If his body does not appear within a few days, it will mean the man has left this city. Although why an honored citizen should turn murderer and thief is beyond me."

When Inspector Chafik reached home, he found his wife in tears; Faisal had not returned and it was already night.

The stillness in the house was heartbreaking. Chafik remembered the busy feet, the treble voice, the uproar of a lively boy, and he repented moments of anger when meditations had been disturbed. He held Leila and tried to comfort her with passages from the Koran, but grief overcame him and he joined her in tears.

"How fortunate that we are not English and do not find it necessary to inhibit emotion," he declared.

Presently he gave Leila a sedative, arranged for a neighbor to sit with her, and went out into the dark streets. He wandered, searching, and questioning the police patrols; duty would not permit him to assign men solely to the quest for his son.

At dawn Chafik went to his office and fell asleep in a chair. And it was there that Abdullah, arriving early, found him. The sergeant, too, was red-eyed and weary.

"Sir," he said with pity, "I regret I have no news of Faisal."

"You, too, have been searching?"

"I took the liberty, sir."

"Keep to your duty. We must both remember our duty," Chafik said, and added less harshly, "but thank you, Abdullah. Is there news of Topalian?"

"None. Today, perhaps, the noses of the police will discover —" the sergeant stopped suddenly, remembering the missing Faisal. Hurriedly he said, "I have to report a singular incident. There was another of the bazaar waifs outside as I came in."

"Yes? Yes?"

"He told me to tell you that Dr. Ghaffari has made large purchases of food. I held the child briefly, but his teeth were sharp." Abdullah tenderly nursed a wrist.

Chafik reached for a cigarette. "So the little ears are still busy. Could it be?"

No, it was too fantastic. "Yet, it is strange," he went on, "that a man who has never squandered more than fifty *fils* a day on his stomach these many years should suddenly indulge his appetite."

With little heart, but still pursuing this elusive notion, he began a busy day. Other things than the Topalian case required his attention, and the Inspector occupied himself with these until the call to prayer reminded him that the day was ending.

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Chafik thought: Another night. Darkness, and all it shrouds. My son —

Violently, he swept the papers from his desk and shouted, "To the Pit with duty! To the Pit with Constantine and Topalian! I will divert every man. I —"

Sergeant Abdullah appeared at the door. "Sir," he said, "a boy wishes to speak with you."

The boy was frightened. His bare toes curled and uncurled on the cheap carpet.

"What now?" Chafik asked.

"Sahib," the boy said breathlessly, "I am to say there is a man in hiding. The proof is his stomach's demands. He who sends me has found a way into the hiding place and has entered it to seek final proof."

The Inspector, with a tiger's leap, reached the boy, seized the slack of his gown, and shouted, "Who sent you?"

"I will not talk! I am Faisal's man!"

There was a ripping sound as the threadbare garment tore. Brown buttocks vanished through the door and disappeared down the gloomy corridor, as the boy outran the police.

"Imbecile!" Inspector Chafik exclaimed. "Imbecile!"

"I could not stop him," Abdullah said defensively.

"I am the imbecile! How could I doubt that Faisal was behind all this? He is of the bazaars. He mobilized his old friends and directed their inquisitive ears to help me. And I was too stupid to understand his messages."

The moment of relevation passed. "Faisal! Where has he gone? Into what danger? I must find my son, Abdullah!"

Chafik calmed himself and forced himself to sit at his desk and light a cigarette. "A man in hiding — misered *fils* spent suddenly on food. Oh, Merciful One! A chain and an iron collar but no dog! Abdullah, get the young Topalian from the detention room."

When the sergeant returned with George Topalian, Chafik stood on tiptoe in an effort to match the young man's stature.

"You are foolish and stubborn," he said, pointing his chin accusingly. "You gave me a lying alibi for the night your cousin disappeared, because you were with a woman, probably a married one since you protect her with your silence. You quarreled with your cousin about her because he had stern morals. So, enough. Tell me, when Dr. Ghaffari left the shop after purchasing the chest, did he slam the door?"

Topalian stammered, "Yes — yes, I think I heard it slam."

"Neither you nor your cousin actually saw Ghaffari reach the street?" the Inspector pursued.

"No, the passage leading to the door is at an angle."

"And when you returned with the porters, the chest was locked?"

"It had been padlocked."

Inspector Chafik's face was a mask. He reached into a drawer, grabbed his gun, and ran.

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The crowds that filled the bazaars parted from the madman with a gun. He shouted, "Compassionate One, grant me time!" He was hatless, his pomaded hair was in disarray, and he had torn open his collar.

When Chafik reached the old house by the river, he hammered on the door and his voice cracked as he demanded admission. There was no answer, and he butted the door with his shoulder.

At that moment it opened and he fell into the dark hall.

He lost the gun on the tiled floor and scrabbled with bleeding fingers to find it. A figure materialized from the shadows and Chafik saw an arm raised to deliver a blow. He rolled clear and was shocked by pain as his shoulder hit the gun.

He seized it and rose to one knee.

In the smoky light from an oil lamp in an adjoining room he saw the dull gleam of metal — an ancient battle-ax poised for another blow. He steadied his wrist and fired twice.

The shots echoed in the vaulted hall. Inspector Chafik rose and looked down at the still form of Dr. Ghaffari, and said in prayer, "God forgive me." He turned quickly away.

He searched the rooms until he found a door hidden by a wall hanging. It was locked. He blew out the lock with his gun and did not feel the splinters that lacerated his face. He went down winding steps into the cellar of Ghaffari's house.

Ghaffari's prisoners were in an alcove strewn with straw. The man had an iron collar around his neck and was fastened to the wall by a chain. The boy was bound with rope, and both were gagged with tape.

Chafik released Faisal, saying over and over, "My son, my son." He took the boy in his arms and wept.

Faisal's lips were torn by the tape and he whimpered, "Father, it hurts. But, my father, there is the man."

Inspector Chafik used the barrel of his gun to force a link in the chain. He said, "Later we will remove the collar. It does not exactly adorn you, Mr. Topalian."

The antique dealer was unharmed, but shock had left its mark. He shook his head and said, "Ghaffari is a madman. Why did he keep me chained and feed me so lavishly? How did I get here?"

Chafik said, "After you sold Ghaffari the chest and he asked to have it delivered, he gave his house key to your cousin. Then he went out and slammed the door. But it was not the door he slammed. It was the lid of the chest. He was inside it."

"Then Ghaffari attacked me after George had gone for the porters!" Topalian exclaimed. "I remember a nightmare of suffocation."

"You had been bound, gagged, and probably chloroformed. And you journeyed, sir, in the chest, escorted in all innocence by your cousin, who was in too much of a hurry to heed the porters' grumbles about excessive weight. Your suffocation was real; you survived because there were cracks in the chest and because Ghaf-

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fari did not want you to die. Only one murder was planned for that night — Constantine's."

"Murdered?"

"For the chalice. Ghaffari admitted him to the shop, posed as your friend, and then killed him. Afterward, he put on your robe and hat and walked out boldly. He had correctly calculated the fading eyesight of the bazaar's ancient watchman. After vanishing into the maze of streets, he removed the robe and went home without exciting suspicion. He had the chalice, and he had his alibi."

Topalian shook his head. "But why didn't he kill me?"

"Because, sir, he couldn't dispose of your body. In this heat and in a house where there are other families —" Chafik raised his thumb and forefinger to his nose. "He had to keep you alive until the search for you as the murderer had died down. And if my son and his friends had not noticed the change in Ghaffari's shopping habits —"

The Inspector heard a noise upstairs. He checked his gun and ran. The doctor's body was gone from the hall and a trail of blood led to one of the rooms.

Chafik followed it. The dying man was in a chair by the moonlit window. He had taken the chalice from its hiding place and sat holding it with both hands. The beauty of the lapis and gold transfigured his waxen face. In his last moments, Dr. Ghaffari forgot pain.

He slowly raised his head, recognized the Inspector, and whispered, "I did not take it for money. I could not let it go — into alien hands — far from our land."

The deep-set eyes became brilliant. "This," Ghaffari said in a suddenly strong voice, "is how the Sumerian was buried, holding his funeral cup. Where is my escort to the next world? The slaughtered ones — the —"

He bowed his head over the chalice; even in death he embraced it. . . .

When Inspector Chafik was able to leave with his son, Faisal looked up anxiously and asked, "My father, did I do well?"

"My son," replied the little man, "it was not well to distress your tender mother, and me, and I do not think it was wisdom to enter a murderer's house. But, my son, yes, you did most well, you and your army of little ears!"

"Then, if I did well, am I to be rewarded?"

"Ask, my son, ask!" Chafik said, embracing the boy.

Too late he saw the calculating look in those large eyes. Too late he remembered that Faisal had been whetted on the stone of the bazaars.

"My father," Faisal said innocently, "it is sad to be homeless, as I know. And have you not shown me that one must have compassion for a waif — such as the cat and her five kittens? I did what I did because of them. So, may I keep them?"

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PRIZE-WINNING STORY

Peter Godfrey, creator of the South African detective, Rolf le Roux, has always been preoccupied with aspects of time — the past, the present, the future, and other dimensions of the inexorable ticking away of seconds, minutes, hours — even centuries and millenniums. And what an important factor time is in, say, murder . . . the time of death, the time of an alibi, the time it takes to be suspected, accused, charged, tried, convicted, the time it takes to be hanged or gassed or electrocuted . . .

Here is a story that has an elapsed time of, essentially, four minutes — from exactly six minutes to 6 until precisely two minutes to 6. And yet in those four minutes there seem to be years, whole lifetimes . . . Again Peter Godfrey has played with the toy of time — and again in an unusual way. The familiar elements of his story, transformed by the magic touch of time, now seem wholly fresh and original.

HAIL AND FAREWELL

by PETER GODFREY

THE MAN HAD BEEN QUITE A WHILE at the cocktail counter when the woman came in. Her hesitation was barely perceptible; then she came forward casually and took the vacant seat next to him. He was conscious of her presence only in an oblique view, a knowledge that the space beside him had been filled. He held his glass with both hands, rolled the liquor gently from side to side, and his thoughts were very far away.

She ordered a cocktail.

After a few minutes he felt her hand laid gently on his arm, and turned his head to look at her. She was young and gay and attractive, and the sparkle in her eyes matched the play of light in the amber liquid in her glass.

She said, "I'm terribly sorry to interrupt your deep thoughts, but do you have the correct time?"

He cocked his elbow to bring his watch nearer to his eyes. "I make it exactly six minutes to 6." Then added, "My thoughts weren't as deep as all that."

"Are you quite sure your watch is correct?"

"Positive. This watch hasn't gained or lost a minute in five years."

She said, "Thank you," and then, in explanation, "I'm afraid I'm rather a terrible person, really. You see, I've got an absolute dread of being late

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for appointments, and I promised to meet a friend round the corner. I wanted to find out if I could linger a minute or two over my cocktail — but that's really no justification for interrupting your day dream."

"No justification is necessary," he said. "It was a very pleasant awakening." He took a sip of his drink, brooded a moment, then looked up and smiled. "After all, appointments should be kept like a contract — to the letter — shouldn't they?"

"I'm glad you understand. It would have been quite natural for you to feel irritated — a perfect stranger interrupting you like that."

He said, "Your adjective is very truthful — you *are* perfect — and it's a very consoling thought to me that next time we meet we won't be strangers."

"Next time? Oh, no, I'm afraid that's quite impossible. Thank you for the compliment all the same. And now, can you please satisfy me again as to the correct time?"

"I hate to tell you, but it's exactly two minutes to 6."

He got up as she did, and walked with her to the door. "Can't I possibly see you again?"

Her smile was charming. "No," she said. "Goodbye."

"*Au revoir*," he said.

In that fraction of a second as she entered the cocktail lounge and orientated herself to the new surroundings, she took careful stock of herself.

Everything was all right — so far. Nobody could have seen her go to Apollo's apartment; nobody else would come there until 7 tonight. Because of the gloves there would be no fingerprints, and no telltale powder burns on her hands. And if they did find the gloves and the gun — well, you could buy hundreds of gloves exactly the same at any department store, and the gun was Apollo's own.

Suspicion — but of course they would suspect. She would be the first choice because she had the most obvious motive — the discarded woman who had been heard to utter threats. It would look bad, and only her alibi would upset their calculations. Such a careful alibi. Going to the movies down the road, carefully preserving the ticket stub, making herself memorable by chatting light-heartedly to the doorman when she came out at 5:25. Not to cover herself for the period of the crime, but to establish a good reason why she should be on this side of town a half hour later. Then, after talking to the doorman, the swift rush to the apartment, shooting Apollo, turning the hands of his watch to five minutes to 6, smashing it, and the swift rush back . . .

That was the subtlety of the time factor. There were only twenty minutes involved either way; the medical evidence could not come any closer than that, and they would be forced to accept five minutes to 6 as the actual time of death. And now she was here in this cocktail lounge, minutes ahead of time — and all the evidence against her could go hang!

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A stranger was the best idea. Friends and acquaintances might be suspect, but nobody could doubt the evidence of someone who didn't know her and whom she didn't know. A man . . . That one there, with the empty seat beside him.

She crossed over, sat down, and ordered a cocktail.

His age was somewhere near 40, and he was slightly inclined to plumpness. His brown hair was bushy rather than wavy; each thick eyebrow seemed larger than the infinitesimal mustache. He sat toying with his drink, and his mind seemed very far away. At precisely the right moment she reached out and touched his arm.

She said, "I'm terribly sorry to interrupt your deep thoughts, but do you have the correct time?"

He consulted his watch. "I make it exactly six minutes to 6."

Even while he was still speaking, her mind was analyzing his attitude. No good. He's not concentrating enough. He may never remember the incident. It needed more . . .

She said, "Are you quite sure your watch is correct?" — and all the time she was smiling pleasantly, trying to attract him, vibrantly willing him to take notice and remember. But his attitude was still casual.

"Positive," he said. "This watch hasn't gained or lost a minute in five years."

She thanked him, still smiling, still trying to appear provocative, and all the time torturing herself with doubts. It's enough, she told herself; I mustn't overdo it. But *is* it enough? Isn't it too ordinary to stick in his mind? And if it doesn't —

Her thoughts poised in mid-air. Out of her indecision the words came tumbling — gaily, inconsequentially, involuntarily: "I'm afraid I'm rather a terrible person, really. You see, I've got an absolute dread of being late for appointments, and I promised to meet a friend round the corner. I wanted to find out if I could linger a minute or two over my cocktail — but that's really no justification for interrupting your day dream."

He murmured something polite and turned back to his drink, and again she was not listening to him because suddenly she was aghast at what she had said. This silly story about meeting a friend! He'd remember that, and the police would pounce on it and devil her with questions. Who was she meeting? Where? When? What could she answer?

A little voice at the back of her mind spoke, cutting across her panic, soothing it, until bubbling relief almost reached her lips. That was it — if she said she was supposed to meet Apollo and he didn't turn up, it would take all the wind out of their sails. Apollo! What an inspiration! But wait; the man was talking again? Listen.

". . . appointments should be kept like a contract — to the letter — shouldn't they?"

This is perfect, she thought. He is going to try and pick me up. He'll never forget now. I must keep talking.

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She said, "I'm glad you understand. It would have been quite natural for you to feel irritated — a perfect stranger interrupting you like that."

He smiled, paid her a compliment, said something about meeting again. She thought: Careful now. He's playing along nicely, perhaps too nicely. If we go on like this he will definitely remember me, but will he remember the time? I mustn't let him forget.

She picked on a phrase in his last sentence and repeated it: "Next time? Oh, no, I'm afraid that's quite impossible. Thank you for the compliment all the same. And now, can you please satisfy me again as to the correct time?"

He looked at his watch regretfully, and told her it was exactly two minutes to six. And now, finally, she was sure it would stick in his mind.

At the door he began to importune her to see him again. "No," she said, and then, "Goodbye."

He said "*Au revoir*," and she walked away with mirth fizzing inside her at the unconscious truth of his statement.

Of course they would meet again.

Not tonight at her apartment when the police would come to arrest her. Not tomorrow or the next day. But he'd be there, at the trial, swearing very sincerely that at the time Apollo Brink had been done to death she was having chitchat with him over a cocktail on the other side of the city.

As he sat at the cocktail counter, gently swishing the liquor in his glass, he was wondering how one went about murdering a man you hadn't even seen.

And knew nothing about, really. Only the name, and that Madge was in love with him — nothing about his appearance, his manners, his habits — anything that could provide the basis for a well-thought-out plan.

He had to act quickly to satisfy the pressing urgency within him, and yet he knew that if he rushed he would eventually hang. He did not want to hang — not because he was afraid of dying, but because he wanted Madge back, because he wanted their life together to go on as it had always gone on. Until now. Until this other man . . .

His mind oozed out of his eyes and started to sway with the liquor in his glass. Cause — cure, cure — kill, kill — live, live —

The woman who had come to sit next to him touched him gently on the arm.

For one fleeting second his consciousness gulped in a certainty that this was Madge, come back; then he turned his head and saw a stranger. He did not hear her first words clearly — only something about his thoughts being deep — but suddenly he realized with a shock that his thoughts had not been deep at all. They were not really thoughts. Just half lights and half shades. The mere spray of the storm inside him.

He saw the woman's lips moving to new words, an inquiry of the time, and he told her. Involuntarily he added his own confession: "My

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thoughts weren't as deep as all that."

The conversation went on like a dream. Was he certain of the time? Yes, he was certain. His watch had been accurate for five years. The dream flipped over to the real. Five years. Change. That was the key — change. Had he been like the watch for the last five years, always consistent, unalterable? Or had he changed? Madge had, of course, but to what extent was he responsible?

From one point of view their life together was like a contract — each satisfied the other in a particular degree. And now the contract was broken. Why? Why were contracts ever broken? Who had caused the breach — Madge or him?

And if it was he, there would be no sense in anything — no sense in murder, no sense in even trying. Madge would never come back. But was it he? How could he make sure? What could he have lost in the last five years? He still had his money, his health, his sense of humor, his love. He had lost nothing — except five years. Had the time subtly scarred his face or his personality?

He remembered how it was before he met Madge, that indefinable something that had drawn most women to him, that had drawn Madge to him, that had kept her with him for five years. Five years. If those years had killed the old power in him, the old attraction, there could be no hope.

He had to find out.

He looked at the girl next to him and saw she was pretty, and friendly, and had a musical voice. Her words were something about an appointment and justification for interrupting his day dream. There was a spider-web gossamer of changed tone in her last sentence.

He wondered whether she was attracted to him.

"No justification is necessary," he said. "It was a very pleasant awakening."

Strangely, when he should have looked at her, his eyes turned to his glass. In the amber translucency of his liquor he saw no pictures, but it seemed to give a clarity to his own mind. Here was his chance. A girl, young, sophisticated — the way Madge had been. Could he make her see in him what Madge had seen? The test had started — he had paid her a compliment. But words alone were nothing. There were so many other things — the little movements of his face and shoulders when he spoke to her, the hinted promises in his eyes. Could he make her reach out for them, as he had once made Madge reach out, as all the other women had reached out?

He had to find out. This was his chance. Keep the conversation going.

He said, "After all, appointments should be kept like a contract — to the letter — shouldn't they?"

Was there a new interest in her eyes? Or was it merely that he was looking closely at her for the first time?

At least she answered. "I'm glad you understand. It would have been

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quite natural for you to feel irritated — a perfect stranger interrupting you like that."

He let his eyes smile at her, admiringly, hintful, and his voice was warm with subtle expression. "Your adjective is very truthful — you *are* perfect — and it's a very consoling thought to me that next time we meet we won't be strangers."

A veil came over her expression. She said, "Next time? Oh, no, I'm afraid that's quite impossible . . ."

In the reeling misery of his consciousness he heard her ask again for the time, answered her, and followed her through a mist to the door.

He pleaded: "Can't I possibly see you again?"

She smiled, but the smile was only amusement. "No," she said. "Goodbye."

He answered "*Au revoir*," but he knew it was only a gesture. Bravado. He would never see her again. And he would never see Madge again. Even if he killed Madge's lover, this Apollo Brink, he would never see Madge again.

There was only one thing left for him to do and with that overwhelming realization he started to walk towards his car.

Under the rear seat was a coil of rope. In a quiet turning off the Great West Road he had once noticed a tree with a stout branch projecting at just about the right height.

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LEAVE IT TO THE KIDS . . .

Would you have ever imagined, in your wildest dreams, that L. Frank Baum, creator of the Wizard of Oz and such other fabulous characters as the Tin Woodman, the Cowardly Lion, and Tik-Tok, once wrote a straightforward, deadly serious "locked room" story? Unbelievable and improbable as it seems, it is true!

The story appeared in a once-popular, pocket-size magazine now long forgotten — "The White Elephant," issue of September 1897, published by Frank Tousey of New York. The tale itself has none of Mr. Baum's Ozian lightheartedness: it is the story of a cold and calculating bank cashier, and since it was written before Oz was even born, it contains strong potions of irony and immorality — qualities that were conspicuously absent in the later tales of the most Utopian fairyland ever conceived, at least by an American.

Lyman Frank Baum was a struggling editor, hard put to feed his growing family, when in 1899 he struck pay dirt. His FATHER GOOSE *book became a best seller, running up sales of 1000 copies per day for the first three months after publication. But this was only a sign of coming events. In 1900 came the first of the Oz books —* THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ *— and a great American series of fairy tales had begun. Edward Wagenknecht has called the Oz saga "the first distinctive attempt to construct a fairyland out of American materials" — and which of us can deny the wholesome influence of the Oz books during our childhood? Yes, they opened up new and irresistible vistas, brought us wonder and surprise, and surely enriched our imaginations.*

An earlier generation remembers with delight the sensational musical extravaganza of 1901 — "The Wizard of Oz" — which starred David Montgomery and the unforgettable Fred Stone; and our own generation remembers with equal delight the 1939 technicolor movie from MGM in which Judy Garland sang the role of Dorothy, Ray Bolger danced the part of the Scarecrow, Bert Lahr clowned as the Cowardly Lion, Jack Haley strutted and glistened as the Tin Woodman, and Frank Morgan hocuspocused as the Wonderful Wizard. And future generations, we are certain, will see revivals with no less delight — for the characters in the Land of Oz will live forever.

It is curious that so popular a series has never enjoyed the approval of

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teachers and librarians. Indeed, the amazing success of the Oz stories was achieved in spite of their having been frowned on by all the higher educational authorities. In our own boyhood we remember that libraries of big cities refused to permit the Oz books on their shelves — a colossal loss, in our opinion, to millions of big-city children. The reason usually advanced by the powers-that-were went something like — "The Oz books do not have literary style." Perhaps that is so; but American children have pronounced the Oz stories to be classics — and hang literary style! Another reason advanced by our guardians of culture was — "The Oz books do not have imaginative distinction." About that we have no doubts whatever: the Oz stories have stirred the imaginations of literally millions of boys and girls, and the undeniable fact that the Oz books are still tremendously popular proves beyond question that the higher educators are still issuing pronunciamentoes from ivory towers. Leave it to the kids — they know!

And now see what L. Frank Baum did in the field of crime and locked rooms, before he envisioned the Emerald City and Jack Pumpkinhead and the Gump and the Sawhorse and Glinda the Good . . .

THE SUICIDE OF KIAROS

by L. FRANK BAUM

MR. FELIX MARSTON, CASHIER FOR the great mercantile firm of Van Alsteyne & Traynor, sat in his little private office with a balance sheet before him and a frown upon his handsome face. At times he nervously ran his slim fingers through the mass of dark hair that clustered over his forehead, and the growing expression of annoyance upon his features fully revealed his disquietude.

The world knew and admired Mr. Marston, and a casual onlooker would certainly have decided that something had gone wrong with the firm's financial transactions; but Mr. Marston knew himself better than the world did, and grimly realized that although something had gone very wrong indeed, it affected himself in an unpleasantly personal way.

The world's knowledge of the popular young cashier included the following items: He had entered the firm's employ years before in an inferior position, and by energy, intelligence, and business ability, had worked his way up until he reached the post he now occupied, and became his employers' most trusted

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servant. His manner was grave, earnest, and dignified; his judgment, in business matters, clear and discerning. He had no intimate friends, but was courteous and affable to all he met, and his private life, so far as it was known, was beyond reproach. Mr. Van Alsteyne, the head of the firm, conceived a warm liking for Mr. Marston, and finally invited him to dine at his house. It was there the young man first met Gertrude Van Alsteyne, his employer's only child, a beautiful girl and an acknowledged leader in society. Attracted by the man's handsome face and gentlemanly bearing the heiress encouraged him to repeat his visit, and Marston followed up his advantage so skillfully that within a year she had consented to become his wife. Mr. Van Alsteyne did not object to the match. His admiration for the young man deepened, and he vowed that upon the wedding day he would transfer one-half his interest in the firm to his son-in-law.

Therefore the world, knowing all this, looked upon Mr. Marston as one of fortune's favorites, and predicted a great future for him. But Mr. Marston, as I said, knew himself more intimately than did the world, and now, as he sat looking upon that fatal trial balance, he muttered in an undertone:

"Oh, you fool — you fool!"

Clear-headed, intelligent man of the world though he was, one vice had mastered him. A few of the most secret, but most dangerous gambling dens knew his face well. His ambition was unbounded, and before he had even dreamed of being able to win Miss Van Alsteyne as his bride, he had figured out several ingenious methods of winning a fortune at the green table. Two years ago he had found it necessary to "borrow" a sum of money from the firm to enable him to carry out these clever methods. Having, through some unforeseen calamity, lost the money, another sum had to be abstracted to allow him to win back enough to even the accounts. Other men have attempted this before; their experiences are usually the same. By a neat juggling of figures, the books of the firm had so far been made to conceal his thefts, but now it seemed as if fortune, in pushing him forward, was about to hurl him down a precipice.

His marriage to Gertrude Van Alsteyne was to take place in two weeks, and as Mr. Van Alsteyne insisted upon keeping his promise to give Marston an interest in the business, the change in the firm would necessitate a thorough overhauling of the accounts, which meant discovery and ruin to the man who was about to grasp a fortune and a high social position — all that his highest ambition had ever dreamed of attaining.

It is no wonder that Mr. Marston, brought face to face with his critical position, denounced himself for his past folly, and realized his helplessness to avoid the catastrophe that was about to crush him.

A voice outside interrupted his musings.

"It is Mr. Marston I wish to see."

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The cashier thrust the sheet of figures into a drawer of the desk, hastily composed his features, and opened the glass door beside him.

"Show Mr. Kiaros this way," he called, after a glance at his visitor. He had frequently met the person who now entered his office, but he could not resist a curious glance as the man sat down on a chair and spread his hands over his knees. He was short and thick-set in form, and both oddly and carelessly dressed, but his head and face were most venerable in appearance. Flowing locks of pure white graced a forehead whose height and symmetry denoted unusual intelligence, and a full beard of the same purity reached almost to his waist. The eyes were large and dark, but not piercing in character, rather conveying in their frank glance kindness and benevolence. A round cap of some dark material was worn upon his head, and this he deferentially removed as he seated himself, and said:

"For me a package of value was consigned to you, I believe?"

Marston nodded gravely. "Mr. Williamson left it with me."

"I will take it," announced the Greek, calmly. "Twelve thousand dollars it contains."

Marston started. "I knew it was money," he said, "but was not aware of the amount. This is it, I think."

He took from the huge safe a packet, corded and sealed, and handed it to his visitor. Kiaros took a penknife from his pocket, cut the cords and removed the wrapper, after which he proceeded to count the contents.

Marston listlessly watched him. Twelve thousand dollars. That would be more than enough to save him from ruin, if only it belonged to him instead of this Greek money-lender.

"The amount, it is right," declared the old man, rewrapping the parcel of notes. "You have my thanks, sir. Good afternoon," and he rose to go.

"Pardon me, sir," said Marston, with a sudden thought. "It is after banking hours. Will it be safe to carry this money with you until morning?"

"Perfectly," replied Kiaros. "I am never molested, for I am old, and few know my business. My safe at home large sums often contains. The money I like to have near me, to accommodate my clients."

He buttoned his coat tightly over the packet, and then in turn paused to look at the cashier.

"Lately you have not come to me for favors," he said.

"No," answered Marston, arousing from a slight reverie. "I have not needed to. Still, I may be obliged to visit you again soon."

"Your servant I am pleased to be," said Kiaros with a smile, and turning abruptly he left the office.

Marston glanced at his watch. He was engaged to dine with his betrothed that evening, and it was nearly time to return to his lodgings to dress. He attended to one or two matters in his usual methodical way, and then left the office for the night, relinquishing any further duties to his assistant. As he passed through the

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various business offices on his way out, he was greeted respectfully by his fellow-employees, who already regarded him a member of the firm.

Almost for the first time during their courtship, Miss Van Alsteyne was tender and demonstrative that evening, and seemed loath to allow him to leave the house when he pleaded a business engagement and arose to go. She was a stately beauty, and little given to emotional ways, therefore her new mood affected him greatly, and as he walked away he realized, with a sigh, how much it would cost him to lose so dainty and charming a bride.

At the first corner he paused and examined his watch by the light of the street lamp. It was 9 o'clock. Hailing the first passing cab, he directed the man to drive him to the lower end of the city, and leaning back upon the cushions, he became occupied in earnest thought.

The jolting of the cab over a rough pavement finally aroused him, and looking out he signaled the driver to stop.

"Shall I wait, sir?" asked the man, as Marston alighted and paid his fare.

"No."

The cab rattled away, and the cashier retraced his way a few blocks and then walked down a side street that seemed nearly deserted, so far as he could see in the dim light. Keeping track of the house numbers, which were infrequent and often nearly obliterated, he finally paused before a tall, brick building, the lower floors of which seemed occupied as a warehouse.

"Two eighty-six," he murmured. "If I remember right there should be a stairway at the left — ah, here it is."

There was no light at the entrance, but having visited the place before, under similar circumstances, Marston did not hesitate, but began mounting the stairs, guiding himself in the darkness by keeping one hand upon the narrow rail. One flight — two — three — four —

"His room should be straight before me," he thought, pausing to regain his breath. "Yes, I think there is a light shining under the door."

He advanced softly, knocked, and then listened. There was a faint sound from within, and then a slide in the upper panel of the door was pushed aside, permitting a strong ray of lamp-light to strike Marston full in the face.

"Oho!" said a calm voice, "Mr. Marston has honored me. To enter I entreat you."

The door was thrown open and Kiaros stood before him, with a smile upon his face, gracefully motioning him to advance. Marston returned the old man's courteous bow, and entering the room, took a seat near the table, at the same time glancing at his surroundings.

The room was plainly but substantially furnished. A small safe stood in a corner at his right, and near it was the long table, used by Kiaros as a

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desk. It was littered with papers and writing material, and behind it was a high-backed, padded easy-chair, evidently the favorite seat of the Greek, for after closing the door he walked around the table and sat in the big chair, facing his visitor.

The other end of the room boasted a fireplace, with an old-fashioned mantel bearing an array of curiosities. Above it was a large clock, and at one side stood a small bookcase containing a number of volumes printed in the Greek language. A small alcove, containing a couch, occupied the remaining side of the small apartment, and it was evident these cramped quarters constituted Kiaros's combined office and living rooms.

"So soon as this I did not expect you," said the old man, in his grave voice.

"I am in need of money," replied Marston, abruptly, "and my interview with you this afternoon reminded me that you have sometimes granted me an occasional loan. Therefore, I have come to negotiate with you."

Kiaros nodded, and studied with his dark eyes the composed features of the cashier.

"A satisfactory debtor you have ever proved," said he, "and to pay me with promptness never failed. How much do you require?"

"Twelve thousand dollars."

In spite of his self-control, Kiaros started as the young man coolly stated this sum.

"Impossible!" he ejaculated.

"Why is it impossible?" demanded Marston. "I know you have the money."

"True; I deny it not," returned Kiaros. "Also to lend money is my business. But see — I will be frank with you Mr. Marston — I cannot take the risk. You are cashier for hire; you have no property; security for so large a sum you cannot give. Twelve thousand dollars! It is impossible!"

"You loaned Williamson twelve thousand," persisted Marston.

"Mr. Williamson secured me."

Marston rose from his chair and began slowly pacing up and down before the table, his hands clasped tightly behind him and an impatient frown contracting his features. The Greek watched him calmly.

"Perhaps you have not heard, Mr. Kiaros," he said, at length, "that within two weeks I am to be married to Mr. Van Alsteyne's only daughter."

"I had not heard."

"And at the same time I am to receive a large interest in the business as a wedding gift from my father-in-law."

"To my congratulations you are surely entitled."

"Therefore my need is only temporary. I shall be able to return the money within thirty days, and I am willing to pay you well for the accommodation."

"So great a chance I cannot undertake," returned Kiaros, with a slight shrug. "You are not yet married, a partner in the firm not yet. To die, to quarrel with the lady, to lose Mr.

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Van Alsteyne's confidence, would leave me to collect the sum wholly unable. I might a small amount risk — the large amount is impossible."

Marston suddenly became calm, and resumed his chair with a quiet air, to Kiaros's evident satisfaction.

"You have gambled?" asked the Greek, after a pause.

"Not lately. I shall never gamble again. I owe no gambling debts — this money is required for another purpose."

"Can you not do with less?" asked Kiaros. "An advance I will make of one thousand dollars; not more. That sum is also a risk, but you are a man of discretion; in your ability I have confidence."

Marston did not reply at once. He leaned back in his chair, and seemed to be considering the money-lender's offer. In reality there passed before his mind the fate that confronted him, the scene in which he posed as a convicted felon; he saw the collapse of his great ambitions, the ruin of those schemes he had almost brought to fruition. Already he felt the reproaches of the man he had robbed, the scorn of the proud woman who had been ready to give him her hand, the cold sneers of those who gloated over his downfall. And then he bethought himself, and thought of other things.

Kiaros rested his elbow upon the table and toyed with a curious-looking paper-cutter. It was made of pure silver, in the shape of a dagger; the blade was exquisitely chased and bore a Greek motto. After a time Kiaros looked up and saw his guest regarding the paper-cutter.

"It is a relic most curious," said he, "from the ruins of Missolonghi rescued, and by a friend sent to me. All that is Greek I love. Soon to my country I shall return, and that is why I cannot risk the money I have in a lifetime earned."

Still Marston did not reply, but sat looking thoughtfully at the table. Kiaros was not impatient. He continued to play with the silver dagger, and poised it upon his finger while he awaited the young man's decision.

"I think I shall be able to get along with the thousand dollars," said Marston at last, his tone showing no trace of the disappointment Kiaros had expected. "Can you let me have it now?"

"Yes. As you know, the money is in my safe. I will make out the note."

He quietly laid down the paper-cutter and drew a notebook from a drawer of the table. Dipping a pen in the inkwell, he rapidly filled out the note and pushed it across the table to Marston.

"Will you sign?" he asked, with his customary smile.

Marston picked up the pen, dashed off his name, and tossed the paper towards Kiaros. The Greek inspected it carefully, and rising from his chair, walked to the safe and drew open the heavy door. He placed the note in one drawer, and from another removed an oblong tin box which he brought to the table. Reseating him-

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self, he opened this box and drew out a large packet of banknotes.

Marston watched him listlessly as he carefully counted out $1000.

"The amount is, I believe, correct," said Kiaros, after a second count. "If you will kindly verify it I shall be pleased."

Marston half arose and reached out his hand. But he did not take the money. Instead, his fingers closed over the handle of the silver dagger, and with a swift, well-directed blow he plunged it to the hilt in the breast of the Greek. The old man lay back in his chair with a low moan, his form quivered once or twice and then became still, while a silence that suddenly seemed oppressive pervaded the little room.

Felix Marston sat down in his chair and stared at the form of Kiaros. The usually benevolent features of the Greek were horribly convulsed, and the dark eyes had caught and held a sudden look of terror. His right hand, resting upon the table, still grasped the bundle of banknotes. The handle of the silver dagger glistened in the lamplight just above the heart, and a dark-colored fluid was slowly oozing outward and discoloring the old man's clothing and the point of his snowy beard.

Marston drew out his handkerchief and wiped the moisture from his forehead. Then he arose, and going to his victim, carefully opened the dead hand and removed the money. In the tin box was the remainder of the $12,000 the Greek had that day received. Marston wrapped it all in a paper and placed it in his breast pocket. Then he went to the safe, replaced the box in its drawer, and found the note he had just signed. This he folded and placed carefully in his pocketbook. Returning to the table, he stood looking down upon the dead man.

"He was a very good fellow, old Kiaros," he murmured. "I am sorry I had to kill him. But this is no time for regrets; I must try to cover all traces of my crime. The reason most murderers are discovered is because they become terrified, are anxious to get away, and so leave clues behind them. I have plenty of time. Probably no one knows of my visit here tonight, and as the old man lives alone, no one is likely to come here before morning."

He looked at his watch. It was a few minutes after 10 o'clock.

"This ought to be a case of suicide," he continued, "and I shall try to make it look that way."

The expression of Kiaros's face first attracted his attention. That look of terror was incompatible with suicide. He drew a chair beside the old man and began to pass his hands over the dead face to smooth out the contracted lines. The body was still warm, and with a little perseverance, Marston succeeded in relaxing the drawn muscles until the face gradually resumed its calm and benevolent look.

The eyes, however, were more difficult to deal with, and it was only

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after repeated efforts that Marston was able to draw the lids over them and hide their startled and horrified gaze. When this was accomplished, Kiaros looked as peaceful as if asleep, and the cashier was satisfied with his progress. He now lifted the Greek's right hand and attempted to clasp the fingers over the handle of the dagger, but they fell away limply.

"Rigor mortis has not yet set in," reflected Marston, "and I must fasten the hand in position until it does. Had the man himself dealt the blow, the tension of the nerves of the arm would probably have forced the fingers to retain their grip upon the weapon." He took his handkerchief and bound the fingers over the hilt of the dagger, at the same time altering the position of the head and body to better suit the assumption of suicide.

"I shall have to wait some time for the body to cool," he told himself, and then he considered what might be done in the meantime.

A box of cigars stood upon the mantel. Marston selected one and lit it. Then he returned to the table, turned up the lamp a trifle, and began searching in the drawers for specimens of the Greek's handwriting. Having secured several of these he sat down and studied them for a few minutes, smoking collectedly the while, and taking care to drop the ashes in a little tray that Kiaros had used for that purpose. Finally, he drew a sheet of paper towards him, and carefully imitating the Greek's sprawling chirography, wrote as follows:

My money I have lost. To live longer I cannot. To die I am therefore resolved. KIAROS.

"I think that will pass inspection," he muttered, looking at the paper approvingly, and comparing it again with the dead man's writing. He placed the paper upon the table before the body of the Greek, and then rearranged the papers as he had found them.

Slowly the hours passed. Marston rose from his chair at intervals and examined the body. At 1 o'clock rigor mortis began to set in, and a half hour later Marston removed the handkerchief, and was pleased to find that the hand retained its grasp upon the dagger. The position of the dead body was now very natural indeed, and the cashier congratulated himself upon his success.

There was but one task remaining for him to accomplish. The door must be found locked upon the inside. Marston searched until he found a piece of twine, one end of which he pinned lightly to the top of the table, a little to the left of the inkwell. The other end of the twine he carried to the door, and passed it through the slide in the panel. Withdrawing the key from the lock of the door, he now approached the table for the last time, taking a final look at the body, and laying the end of his cigar upon the tray. The theory of suicide had been excellently carried out; if only the key could be arranged for, he would be satisfied. He blew out the light.

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It was very dark, but he had carefully considered the distance beforehand, and in a moment he had reached the hallway and softly closed and locked the door behind him. Then he withdrew the key, found the end of the twine which projected through the open slide in the panel, and running this through the ring of the key, he passed the key inside the panel, and allowed it to slide down the cord until a sharp click told him it rested on the table within. A sudden jerk of the twine now unfastened the end which had been lightly pinned to the table, and he drew it out and carefully placed it in his pocket. Before closing the slide of the panel, Marston lighted a match, peered through the slide, and satisfied himself the key was lying in the position he had wished. He breathed more freely then and closed the slide.

A few minutes later he had reached the street, and after a glance up and down stepped boldly from the doorway and walked away.

To his surprise, he now felt himself trembling with nervousness, and despite his endeavors to control himself, it required all of his four-mile walk home to enable him to regain his normal composure.

He let himself in with his latch-key, and made his way noiselessly to his room. As he was a gentleman of regular habits, the landlady never bothered to keep awake for his return.

Mr. Marston appeared at the office the next morning in an unusually good humor, and at once busied himself with the regular routine of his bank duties.

As soon as he was able, he retired to his private office and began to revise the books and make out a new trial balance. The exact amount he had stolen from the firm was put into the safe, the false figures were replaced with correct ones, and by noon the new balance sheet proved that Mr. Marston's accounts were in perfect order.

Just before he started for luncheon a clerk brought him the afternoon paper.

"What do you think, Mr. Marston?" he said. "Old Kiaros has committed suicide."

"Indeed! Do you mean the Kiaros who was here yesterday?" inquired Marston, as he put on his coat.

"The very same. It seems the old man lost his money in some unfortunate speculation, and so took his own life. The police found him in his room this morning, stabbed to the heart. Here is the paper, sir, if you wish to see it."

"Thank you," returned the cashier, in his usual quiet way. "I will buy one when I go out," and without further comment he went to luncheon.

He purchased a paper, and while eating read carefully the account of Kiaros's suicide. The report was reassuring; no one seemed to dream the Greek was the victim of foul play.

The verdict of the coroner's jury completed his satisfaction. They found that Kiaros had committed suicide in

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a fit of despondency. The Greek was buried and forgotten, and soon the papers teemed with sensational accounts of the brilliant wedding of that estimable gentleman, Mr. Felix Marston, to the popular society belle, Miss Gertrude Van Alsteyne. The happy pair made a bridal trip to Europe, and upon their return Mr. Marston was installed as an active partner in the great firm of Van Alsteyne, Traynor & Marston.

This was twenty years ago. Mr. Marston today has an enviable record as an honorable and highly respected man of business, although some consider him a trifle too calculating.

His wife, although she early discovered the fact that he had married her to further his ambition, has found him reserved and undemonstrative, but always courteous and indulgent to both herself and the children.

He holds his head high and looks every man squarely in the eye, and he is very generally envied, since everything seems to prosper in his capable hands.

Kiaros and his suicide are long since forgotten by the police and the public. Perhaps Marston recalls the Greek at times. He told me this story when he lay upon what he supposed was his death-bed . . .

FOR MYSTERY FANS — these swiftly paced mystery-thrillers, all MERCURY PUBLICATIONS, are now on sale at your newsstand:

A MERCURY MYSTERY — "Killer in the Crowd" (formerly "The Man in the Queue"), by Josephine Tey. Abridged edition. ". . . excellent novel . . . a great treat . . ." says Frances Crane in the San Francisco *News*.

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Early in 1953 we received a 'tec tintype in verse from Thomas H. Malone, III, an attorney-at-law in Nashville, Tennessee. It struck us at once that this poem — about Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot — would make an unusual preface to the very next tale we published about the Belgian detective with the egg-shaped head, the luxuriant mustache, and the little gray cells. So, having purchased the poem, we now offer you what might be called a "portrait parle of the peerless Poirot," complete with ratiocinative rhyme, manhunting meter, and a bloodhound beat — and a bow to Ogden Nash in the very first line.

Most authors would love to beg, steal, or boirot
The techniques of Monsieur Hercule Poirot.
His supercharged brain has no B cells or A cells,
It is powered entirely by wee petite gray cells.
His logic is devoid of intuitive flashes,
I like his small shoes and his waxen mustaches,
His peaked lapels and his wasp-girdled waistings,
His sly Gallic needling of poor Captain Hastings.
He disregards clues without any apology,
And concentrates on the murderer's psychology.
His solutions are clear and not vaguely misty.
Oh, how I love you, Miss Agatha Christie!

HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW?

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

HERCULE POIROT ARRANGED HIS letters in a neat pile in front of him. He picked up the topmost letter, studied the address for a moment, then neatly slit the back of the envelope with a little paper knife that he kept on the breakfast table for that express purpose and extracted the contents. Inside was yet another envelope, carefully sealed with purple wax and marked *Private and Confidential*.

Hercule Poirot's eyebrows rose a little on his egg-shaped head. He murmured, "Patience! *Nous allons arriver!*" and once more brought the little paper knife into play. This time the envelope yielded a letter, written in a rather shaky and spiky handwriting. A few words were underlined.

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Hercule Poirot unfolded it and read. The letter was headed once again *Private and Confidential*. On the right-hand side was the address — Rosebank, Charman's Green, Bucks — and the date, March twenty-first.

Dear M. Poirot: I have been recommended to you by an old and valued friend of mine who knows the *worry* and *distress* I have been in lately. Not that this friend knows the actual *circumstances* — those I have kept *entirely* to myself — the matter being strictly private. My friend assures me that you are *discretion* itself — and that there will be no fear of my being involved in a *police* matter which, if my suspicions should prove correct, I should *very much dislike*. But it is of course possible that I am *entirely* mistaken. I do not feel myself clear-headed enough nowadays — suffering as I do from insomnia and the result of a severe illness last winter — to investigate things for myself. I have neither the *means* nor the *ability*. On the other hand, I must reiterate that this is a very delicate family matter and that for many reasons I may want the *whole thing hushed up*. If I am once assured of the *facts*, I can deal with the matter myself and should prefer to do so. I hope that I have made myself clear on this point. If you will undertake this investigation, perhaps you will let me know?

Yours very truly,
AMELIA BARROWBY.

Poirot read the letter through twice. Again his eyebrows rose slightly. Then he placed it on one side and proceeded to the next envelope in the pile.

At 10 o'clock precisely he entered the room where Miss Lemon, his confidential secretary, sat awaiting her instructions for the day. Miss Lemon was 48 and of unprepossessing appearance. Her general effect was that of a lot of bones flung together at random. She had a passion for order almost equaling that of Poirot himself; and though capable of thinking, she never thought unless told to do so.

Poirót handed her the morning correspondence. "Have the goodness, mademoiselle, to write refusals couched in correct terms to all of these."

Miss Lemon ran an eye over the various letters, scribbling a hieroglyphic on each of them. These marks were legible to her alone and were in a code of her own: "Soft soap"; "slap in the face"; "purr purr"; "curt" — and so on. Having done this, she nodded and looked up for further instructions.

Poirot handed her Amelia Barrowby's letter. She extracted it from its double envelope, read it through and looked up inquiringly.

"Yes, M. Poirot?" Her pencil hovered — ready — over her shorthand pad.

"What is your opinion of that letter, Miss Lemon?"

With a slight frown Miss Lemon put down the pencil and read through the letter again.

The contents of a letter meant nothing to Miss Lemon except from

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the point of view of composing an adequate reply. Very occasionally her employer appealed to her human, as opposed to her official, capacities. It slightly annoyed Miss Lemon when he did so — she was very nearly the perfect machine, completely and gloriously uninterested in all human affairs. Her real passion in life was the perfection of a filing system beside which all other filing systems should sink into oblivion. She dreamed of such a system at night. Nevertheless, Miss Lemon was perfectly capable of intelligence on purely human matters, as Hercule Poirot well knew.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Old lady," said Miss Lemon. "Got the wind up pretty badly."

"Ah! The wind rises in her, you think?"

Miss Lemon, who considered that Poirot had been long enough in Great Britain to understand its slang terms, did not reply. She took a brief look at the double envelope.

"Very hush-hush," she said. "And tells you nothing at all."

"Yes," said Hercule Poirot. "I observed that."

Miss Lemon's hand hung once more hopefully over the shorthand pad. This time Hercule Poirot responded.

"Tell her I will do myself the honor to call upon her at any time she suggests, unless she prefers to consult me here. Do not type the letter — write it by hand."

"Yes, M. Poirot."

Poirot produced more correspondence. "These are bills."

Miss Lemon's efficient hands sorted them quickly. "I'll pay all but these two."

"Why those two? There is no error in them."

"They are firms you've only just begun to deal with. It looks bad to pay too promptly when you've just opened an account — looks as though you were working up to get some credit later on."

"Ah!" murmured Poirot. "I bow to your superior knowledge of the British tradesman."

"There's nothing much I don't know about them," said Miss Lemon grimly.

The letter to Miss Amelia Barrowby was duly written and sent, but no reply was forthcoming. Perhaps, thought Hercule Poirot, the old lady had unraveled the mystery herself. Yet he felt a shade of surprise that in that case she should not have written a courteous word to say that his services were no longer required.

It was five days later when Miss Lemon, after receiving her morning's instructions, said, "That Miss Barrowby we wrote to — no wonder there's been no answer. She's dead."

Hercule Poirot said very softly, "Ah — dead." It sounded not so much like a question as an answer.

Opening her handbag, Miss Lemon produced a newspaper clipping. "I saw it in the tube and tore it out."

Just registering in his mind approval of the fact that, though Miss Lemon used the word "tore," she had neatly

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cut the entry out with scissors, Poirot read the announcement taken from the Births, Deaths, and Marriages in the *Morning Post:* "On March 26th — suddenly — at Rosebank, Charman's Green, Amelia Jane Barrowby, in her seventy-third year. No flowers, by request."

Poirot read it over. He murmured under his breath, "Suddenly." Then he said briskly, "If you will be so obliging as to take a letter?"

The pencil hovered. Miss Lemon, her mind dwelling on the intricacies of the filing system, took down in rapid and correct shorthand:

Dear Miss Barrowby: I have received no reply from you, but as I shall be in the neighborhood of Charman's Green on Friday, I will call upon you on that day and discuss more fully the matter you mentioned to me in your letter.

Yours, etc.

"Type this letter, please; and if it is posted at once, it should get to Charman's Green tonight."

On the following morning a letter in a black-edged envelope arrived by the second post:

Dear Sir: In reply to your letter my aunt, Miss Barrowby, passed away on the twenty-sixth, so the matter you speak of is no longer of importance.

Yours truly,
MARY DELAFONTAINE.

Poirot smiled to himself. "No longer of importance . . . Ah — that is what we shall see. *En avant* — to Charman's Green."

Rosebank was a house that seemed likely to live up to its name, which is more than can be said for most English houses of its class and character.

Hercule Poirot paused as he walked up the path to the front door and looked approvingly at the neatly planned beds on either side of him. Rose bushes that promised a good harvest later in the year, and at present daffodils, early tulips, blue hyacinths. The last bed was partly edged with oyster shells.

Poirot murmured to himself, "How does it go, the English rhyme the children sing?

Mistress Mary, quite contrary,
How does your garden grow?
With cockle-shells, and silver bells,
And pretty maids all in a row.

"Not a row, perhaps," he considered, "but here is at least one pretty maid to make the little rhyme come right."

The front door had opened and a neat little maid in cap and apron was looking somewhat dubiously at the spectacle of a heavily mustached foreign gentleman talking aloud to himself in the front garden. She was, as Poirot had noted, a very pretty little maid, with round blue eyes and rosy cheeks.

Poirot raised his hat with courtesy and addressed her: "Pardon, but does a Miss Amelia Barrowby live here?"

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The little maid gasped and her eyes grew rounder. "Oh, sir, didn't you know? She's dead. Ever so sudden it was. Tuesday night."

She hesitated, divided between two strong instincts: the first, distrust of a foreigner; the second, the pleasurable enjoyment of her class in dwelling on the subject of illness and death.

"You amaze me," said Hercule Poirot, not very truthfully. "I had an appointment with the lady for today. However, I can perhaps see the other lady who lives here."

The little maid seemed slightly doubtful. "The mistress? Well, you could see her, perhaps, but I don't know whether she'll be seeing anyone or not."

"She will see me," said Poirot, and handed her a card.

The authority of his tone had its effect. The rosy-cheeked maid fell back and ushered Poirot into a sitting room on the right of the hall. Then, card in hand, she departed to summon her mistress.

Hercule Poirot looked round him. The room was a perfectly conventional drawing room — oatmeal-colored paper with a frieze round the top, rose-colored cushions and curtains, a good many china knickknacks and ornaments. There was nothing in the room that stood out, that announced a definite personality.

Suddenly Poirot, who was very sensitive, felt eyes watching him. He wheeled round. A girl was standing in the entrance of the French window — a small, sallow girl, with very black hair and suspicious eyes.

She came in, and as Poirot made a little bow she burst out abruptly, "Why have you come?"

Poirot did not reply. He merely raised his eyebrows.

"You are not a lawyer — no?" Her English was good, but not for a minute would anyone have taken her to be English.

"Why should I be a lawyer, mademoiselle?"

The girl stared at him sullenly. "I thought you might be. I thought you had come perhaps to say that she did not know what she was doing. I have heard of such things — the not due influence; that is what they call it, no? But that is not right. She wanted me to have the money, and I shall have it. If it is needful I shall have a lawyer of my own. The money is mine. She wrote it down so, and so it shall be." She looked ugly, her chin thrust out, her eyes gleaming.

The door opened and a tall woman entered and said, "Katrina."

The girl shrank, flushed, muttered something, and went out through the French window.

Poirot turned to face the newcomer who had so effectually dealt with the situation by uttering a single word. There had been authority in her voice, and contempt and a shade of well-bred irony. He realized at once that this was the owner of the house, Mary Delafontaine.

"M. Poirot? I wrote to you. You cannot have received my letter."

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"Alas, I have been away from London."

"Oh, I see; that explains it. I must introduce myself. My name is Delafontaine. This is my husband. Miss Barrowby was my aunt."

Mr. Delafontaine had entered so quietly that his arrival had passed unnoticed. He was a tall man with grizzled hair and an indeterminate manner. He had a nervous way of fingering his chin. He looked often toward his wife, and it was plain that he expected her to take the lead in any conversation.

"I much regret that I intrude in the midst of your bereavement," said Hercule Poirot.

"I realize that it is not your fault," said Mrs. Delafontaine. "My aunt died on Tuesday evening. It was quite unexpected."

"Most unexpected," said Mr. Delafontaine. "Great blow." His eyes watched the window where the foreign girl had disappeared.

"I apologize," said Hercule Poirot. "And I withdraw." He moved a step toward the door.

"Half a sec," said Mr. Delafontaine. "You — er — had an appointment with Aunt Amelia, you say?"

"*Parfaitement.*"

"Perhaps you will tell us about it," said his wife. "If there is anything we can do —"

"It was of a private nature," said Poirot. "I am a detective," he added.

Mr. Delafontaine knocked over a little china figure he was handling. His wife looked puzzled.

"A detective? And you had an appointment with auntie? But how extraordinary!" She stared at him. "Can't you tell us a little more, M. Poirot? It — it seems quite fantastic."

Poirot was silent for a moment. He chose his words with care.

"It is difficult for me, madame, to know what to do."

"Look here," said Mr. Delafontaine. "She didn't mention Russians, did she?"

"Russians?"

"Yes, you know — Reds, all that sort of thing."

"Don't be absurd, Henry," said his wife.

Mr. Delafontaine collapsed. "Sorry — sorry — I just wondered."

Mary Delafontaine looked frankly at Poirot. Her eyes were very blue, the color of forget-me-nots. "If you can tell us anything, M. Poirot, I should be glad if you would do so. I can assure you that I have a — a reason for asking."

Mr. Delafontaine looked alarmed. "Be careful, old girl — you know there may be nothing in it."

Again his wife quelled him with a glance. "Well, M. Poirot?"

Slowly, gravely, Hercule Poirot shook his head. He shook it with visible regret, but he shook it. "At present, madame," he said, "I fear I must say nothing."

He bowed, picked up his hat, and moved to the door. Mary Delafontaine came with him into the hall. On the doorstep he paused and looked at her.

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"You are fond of your garden, I think, madame?"

"I? Yes, I spend a lot of time gardening."

"*Je vous fait mes compliments.*"

He bowed once more and strode down to the gate. As he passed through it and turned to the right, he glanced back and registered two impressions — a sallow face watching him from a first-floor window, and a man of erect and soldierly carriage pacing up and down on the opposite side of the street.

Hercule Poirot nodded to himself. "*Definitivement*," he said. "There is a mouse in this hole! What move must the cat make now?"

His decision took him to the nearest post office. Here he put through a couple of telephone calls. The result seemed to be satisfactory. He bent his steps to Charman's Green police station, where he inquired for Inspector Sims.

Inspector Sims was a big, burly man with a hearty manner. "M. Poirot?" he inquired. "I thought so. I've just this minute had a telephone call through from the chief constable about you. He said you'd be dropping in. Come into my office."

The door shut, the Inspector waved Poirot to one chair, and settled himself in another.

"You're very quick onto the mark, M. Poirot. Come to see us about this Rosebank case almost before we know it is a case. What put you onto it?"

Poirot drew out the letter he had received and handed it to the Inspector. The latter read it with some interest.

"Interesting," he said. "The trouble is, it might mean so many things. Pity she couldn't have been a little more explicit. It would have helped us now."

"Or there might have been no need for help."

"You mean?"

"She might have been alive."

"You go as far as that, do you? H'm — I'm not sure you're wrong."

"I pray of you, Inspector, recount to me the facts. I know nothing at all."

"That's easily done. Old lady was taken bad after dinner on Tuesday night. Very alarming. Convulsions — spasms — whatnot. They sent for the doctor. By the time he arrived she was dead. Idea was she'd died of a fit. Well, he didn't much like the look of things. He hemmed and hawed, but he made it clear that he couldn't give a death certificate. And as far as the family go, that's where the matter stands. They're awaiting the result of the post-mortem. We've got a bit farther. The doctor gave us the tip right away — he and the police surgeon did the autopsy together — and the result is in no doubt whatever. The old lady died of a large dose of strychnine."

"Aha!"

"That's right. Very nasty bit of work. Point is, who gave it to her? It must have been administered very shortly before death. First idea was it was given to her in her food at

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dinner — but, frankly, that seems to be a washout. They had artichoke soup, served from a tureen, fish pie, and apple tart."

" 'They' being?"

"Miss Barrowby, Mr. Delafontaine and Mrs. Delafontaine. Miss Barrowby had a kind of nurse-attendant — a half-Russian girl — but she didn't eat with the family. She had the remains as they came out from the dining room. There's a maid, but it was her night out. She left the soup on the stove and the fish pie in the oven, and the apple tart was cold. All three of them ate the same thing — and, apart from that, I don't think you could get strychnine down anyone's throat that way. Stuff's as bitter as gall. The doctor told me you could taste it in a solution of one in a thousand, or something like that."

"Coffee?"

"Coffee's more like it, but the old lady never took coffee."

"I see your point. Yes, it seems an insuperable difficulty. What did she drink at the meal?"

"Water."

"Worse and worse."

"Bit of a teaser, isn't it?"

"She had money, the old lady?"

"Very well to do, I imagine. Of course, we haven't got exact details yet. The Delafontaines are pretty badly off, from what I can make out. The old lady helped with the upkeep of the house."

Poirot smiled a little. He said, "So you suspect the Delafontaines. Which of them?"

"I don't exactly say I suspect either of them in particular. But there it is; they're her only near relations, and her death brings them a tidy sum of money, I've no doubt. We all know what human nature is!"

"Sometimes inhuman — yes, that is very true. And there was nothing else the old lady ate or drank?"

"Well, as a matter of fact —"

"Ah, *voilà!* I felt that you had something, as you say, up your sleeve — the soup, the fish pie, the apple tart — a *bêtise!* Now we come to the hub of the affair."

"I don't know about that. But as a matter of fact, the old girl took a cachet before meals. You know, not a pill or a tablet; one of those rice-paper things with a powder inside. Some perfectly harmless thing for the digestion."

"Admirable. Nothing is easier than to fill a cachet with strychnine and substitute it for one of the others. It slips down the throat with a drink of water and is not tasted."

"That's all right. The trouble is, the girl gave it to her."

"The Russian girl?"

"Yes. Katrina Rieger. She was a kind of lady-help, nurse-companion to Miss Barrowby. Fairly ordered about by her, too, I gather. Fetch this, fetch that, fetch the other, rub my back, pour out my medicine, run round to the chemist — all that sort of business. You know how it is with these old women — they mean to be kind, but what they need is a sort of slave!"

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Poirot smiled.

"And there you are, you see," continued Inspector Sims. "It doesn't fit in what you might call nicely. Why should the girl poison her? Miss Barrowby dies and now the girl will be out of a job, and jobs aren't so easy to find — she's not trained or anything."

"Still," suggested Poirot, "if the box of cachets was left about, anyone in the house might have the opportunity."

"Naturally we're onto that, M. Poirot. I don't mind telling you we're making out inquiries — quiet like, if you understand me. When the prescription was last made up, where it was usually kept; patience and a lot of spade work — that's what will do the trick in the end. And then there's Miss Barrowby's solicitor. I'm having an interview with him tomorrow. And the bank manager. There's a lot to be done still."

Poirot rose. "A little favor, Inspector Sims. You will send me a little word how the affair marches? I would esteem it a great favor. Here is my telephone number."

"Why, certainly, M. Poirot. Two heads are better than one; and, besides, you ought to be in on this, having had that letter and all."

"You are too amiable, Inspector." Politely, Poirot shook hands and took his leave.

He was called to the telephone on the following afternoon. "Is that M. Poirot? Inspector Sims here. Things are beginning to sit up and look pretty in that little matter you and I know of."

"In verity? Tell me, I pray of you."

"Well, here's item No. 1 — and a pretty big item. Miss B. left a small legacy to her niece and everything else to K. In consideration of her great kindness and attention — that's the way it was put. That alters the complexion of things."

A picture rose swiftly in Poirot's mind. A sullen face and a passionate voice saying, "The money is mine. She wrote it down so, and so it shall be." The legacy would not come as a surprise to Katrina — she knew about it beforehand.

"Item No. 2," continued the voice of Inspector Sims. "Nobody but K. handled that cachet."

"You can be sure of that?"

"The girl herself doesn't deny it. What do you think of that?"

"Extremely interesting."

"We only want one thing more — evidence of how the strychnine came into her possession. That oughtn't to be difficult."

"But so far you haven't been successful?"

"I've barely started. The inquest was only this morning."

"What happened at it?"

"Adjourned for a week."

"And the young lady — K.?"

"I'm detaining her on suspicion. Don't want to run any risks. She might have some friends in the country who'd try to get her out of it."

"No," said Poirot. "I do not think she has any friends."

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"Really? What makes you say that, M. Poirot?"

"It is just an idea of mine. There were no other 'items,' as you call them?"

"Nothing that's strictly relevant. Miss B. seems to have been monkeying about a bit with her shares lately — must have dropped quite a tidy sum. It's rather a funny business, one way and another, but I don't see how it affects the main issue — not at present, that is."

"No, perhaps you are right. Well, my best thanks to you. It was most amiable of you to ring me up."

"Not at all. I'm a man of my word. I could see you were interested. Who knows, you may be able to give me a helping hand before the end."

"That would give me a great pleasure. It might help you, for instance, if I could lay my hand on a friend of the girl Katrina."

"I thought you said she hadn't got any friends?" said Inspector Sims, surprised.

"I was wrong," said Hercule Poirot. "She has one."

Before the Inspector could ask a further question, Poirot had rung off.

With a serious face he wandered into the room where Miss Lemon sat at her typewriter. She raised her hands from the keys at her employer's approach and looked at him inquiringly.

"I want you," said Poirot, "to figure to yourself a little history."

Miss Lemon dropped her hands into her lap in a resigned manner. She enjoyed typing, paying bills, filing papers, and recording appointments. To be asked to imagine herself in hypothetical situations bored her very much, but she accepted it as a disagreeable part of a duty.

"You are a Russian girl," began Poirot.

"Yes," said Miss Lemon, looking intensely British.

"You are alone and friendless in this country. You have reasons for not wishing to return to Russia. You are employed as a kind of drudge, nurse-attendant and companion to an old lady. You are meek and uncomplaining."

"Yes," said Miss Lemon obediently, but entirely failing to see herself being meek to any old lady under the sun.

"The old lady takes a fancy to you. She decides to leave her money to you. She tells you so." Poirot paused.

Miss Lemon said "Yes" again.

"And then the old lady finds out something; perhaps it is a matter of money — she may find that you have not been honest with her. Or it might be more grave still — a medicine that tasted different, some food that disagreed. Anyway, she begins to suspect you of something and she writes to a very famous detective — *enfin*, to the most famous detective — me! I am to call upon her shortly. And then, as you say, the dripping will be in the fire. The great thing is to act quickly. And so — before the great detective arrives — the old lady is dead. And the money comes to

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you. . . . Tell me, does that seem to you reasonable?"

"Quite reasonable," said Miss Lemon. "Quite reasonable for a Russian, that is. Personally, I should never take a post as a companion. I like my duties clearly defined. And of course I should not dream of murdering anyone."

Poirot sighed. "How I miss my friend Hastings. He had such an imagination. Such a romantic mind! It is true that he always imagined wrong — but that in itself was a guide."

Miss Lemon was silent. She had heard about Captain Hastings before, and was not interested. She looked longingly at the typewritten sheet in front of her.

"So it seems to you reasonable," mused Poirot.

"Doesn't it to you?"

"I am almost afraid it does," sighed Poirot.

The telephone rang and Miss Lemon went out of the room to answer it. She came back to say, "It's Inspector Sims again."

Poirot hurried to the instrument. " 'Allo, 'allo. What is that you say?"

Sims repeated his statement. "We've found a packet of strychnine in the girl's bedroom — tucked underneath the mattress. The sergeant's just come in with the news. That about clinches it, I think."

"Yes," said Poirot, "I think that clinches it." His voice had changed. It rang with sudden confidence.

When he had rung off, he sat down at his writing table and arranged the objects on it in a mechanical manner. He murmured to himself, "There was something wrong. I felt it — no, not felt. It must have been something I saw. *En avant*, the little gray cells. Ponder — reflect. Was everything logical and in order? The girl — her anxiety about the money; Mme. Delafontaine; her husband — his suggestion of Russians — imbecile, but he is an imbecile; the room; the garden — ah! Yes, *the garden*."

He sat up very stiff. The green light shone in his eyes. He sprang up and went into the adjoining room.

"Miss Lemon, will you have the kindness to leave what you are doing and make an investigation for me?"

"An investigation, M. Poirot? I'm afraid I'm not very good —"

Poirot interrupted her. "You said one day that you knew all about tradesmen."

"Certainly I do," said Miss Lemon with confidence.

"Then the matter is simple. You are to go to Charman's Green and you are to discover a fishmonger."

"A fishmonger?" asked Miss Lemon, surprised.

"Precisely. The fishmonger who supplied Rosebank with fish. When you have found him you will ask him a certain question."

He handed her a slip of paper. Miss Lemon took it, noted its contents without interest, then nodded and slipped the cover on her typewriter.

"We will go to Charman's Green together," said Poirot. "You to the

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fishmonger and I to the police station. It will take us but half an hour from Baker Street."

On arrival at his destination, he was greeted by the surprised Inspector Sims. "Well, this is quick work, M. Poirot. I was talking to you on the phone only an hour ago."

"I have a request to make to you — that you allow me to see this girl Katrina."

"Well, I don't suppose there's any objection to that."

The girl Katrina looked even more sallow and sullen than ever.

Poirot spoke to her very gently. "Mademoiselle, I want you to believe that I am not your enemy. I want you to tell me the truth."

Her eyes snapped defiantly. "I have told the truth. To everyone I have told the truth! If the old lady was poisoned, it was not I who poisoned her. It is all a mistake. You wish to prevent me having the money." Her voice was rasping. She looked, he thought, like a little cornered rat.

"Tell me about this cachet, mademoiselle," M. Poirot went on. "Did no one handle it but you?"

"I have said so, have I not? They were made up at the chemist's that afternoon. I brought them back with me in my bag — that was just before supper. I opened the box and gave Miss Barrowby one with a glass of water."

"No one touched them but you?"

"No." A cornered rat — with courage!

"And Miss Barrowby had for supper only what we have been told: The soup, the fish pie, the tart?"

"Yes." A hopeless "yes" — dark, smoldering eyes that saw no light anywhere.

Poirot patted her shoulder. "Be of good courage, mademoiselle. There may yet be freedom — yes, and money — a life of ease."

She looked at him suspiciously.

As he went out Sims said to him, "I didn't quite get what you said through the telephone — something about the girl having a friend."

"She has one. Me!" said Hercule Poirot, and had left the police station before the Inspector could pull his wits together.

At the Green Cat tearooms, Miss Lemon did not keep her employer waiting. She went straight to the point.

"The man's name is Rudge, in the High Street, and you were quite right. A dozen and a half exactly. I've made a note of what he said." She handed it to him.

"Arrr." It was a deep, rich sound like the purr of a cat.

Hercule Poirot betook himself to Rosebank. As he stood in the front garden, the sun setting behind him, Mary Delafontaine came out to him.

"M. Poirot?" Her voice sounded surprised. "You have come back?"

"Yes, I have come back." He paused and then said, "When I first came here, madame, the children's

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nursery rhyme came into my head when I saw your garden:

Mistress Mary, quite contrary,
How does your garden grow?
With cockle-shells and silver bells,
And pretty maids all in a row.

Only they are not *cockle* shells, are they, madame? They are *oyster* shells." His hand pointed.

He heard her catch her breath and then stay very still. Her eyes asked a question.

He nodded. "*Mais, oui*, I know! The maid left the dinner ready — she will swear and Katrina will swear that that is all you had. Only you and your husband know that you brought back a dozen and a half oysters — a little treat *pour la bonne tante*. So easy to put the strychnine in an oyster. It is swallowed — *comme ça!* But there remain the shells. They must not go in the bucket — the maid would see them. And so you thought of making an edging of them to a flower bed. But there were not enough — the edging is not complete. The effect is bad — it spoils the symmetry of the otherwise charming garden. Those few oyster shells struck an alien note — they displeased my eye on my first visit."

Mary Delafontaine said, "I suppose you guessed from the letter. I knew she had written — but I didn't know how much she'd said."

Poirot answered evasively, "I knew at least that it was a family matter. If it had been a question of Katrina there would have been no point in hushing things up. I understand that you or your husband handled Miss Barrowby's securities to your own profit, and that she found out —"

Mary Delafontaine nodded. "We've done it for years — a little here and there. I never realized she was sharp enough to find out. And then I learned she had sent for a detective; and I found out, too, that she was leaving her money to Katrina — that miserable little creature!"

"And so the strychnine was put in Katrina's bedroom? I comprehend. You save yourself and your husband from what I may discover, and you saddle an innocent child with murder. Had you no pity, madame?"

Mary Delafontaine shrugged her shoulders — her blue forget-me-not eyes looked into Poirot's. He remembered the perfection of her acting the first day he had come and the bungling attempts of her husband. A woman above the average — but inhuman.

She said, "Pity? For that intriguing little rat?" Her contempt rang out.

Hercule Poirot said slowly, "I think, madame, that you have cared in your life for two things only. One is your husband."

He saw her lips tremble.

"And the other — is your garden."

He looked round him. His glance seemed to apologize to the flowers for that which he had done and was about to do.

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William Link and Richard Levinson are the authors of "Whistle While You Work," one of the thirteen "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Ninth Annual Contest — last year's competition. It is the sympathetic tale of a small-town mailman, his nagging wife, and the cruel heat of Cooper, Colorado. . . . The authors, at the time of this writing, are twenty years old, and both attend the University of Pennsylvania. They first met in Junior High School, in Philadelphia, and discovered they had three hobbies in common: reading detective fiction, performing magic, and experimenting with wire recorders. These mutual interests led to an enduring friendship, and soon they began collaborating in their work, especially in the writing and directing of school shows. In their senior year they wrote and produced a musical comedy, and it was so great a success that both were inspired to consider writing a career. But immediately friends and family became prophets of gloom: "You'll starve!" they warned, and "You'll never have anything published!"

Well, the boys were only human — and very young. They took heed of those fearful predictions, and as a compromise with life's eternal verities, enrolled in the Wharton School of Commerce and Finance at Penn. But between classes and fraternity frolics they continue to write together, turning out pieces for "Pennpix" (U. of P.'s humor magazine), radio scripts, and detective short stories. True, there is every indication they are headed for the world of commerce and finance, but we wouldn't be too surprised to see both of them wind up in the School of Journalism!

One thing, however, is sure: the two dire, doleful warnings were unfounded. Here are the boys actually having something published, and so far as we know neither of them has starved.

WHISTLE WHILE YOU WORK

by WILLIAM LINK and RICHARD LEVINSON

THE SUN WAS STRIKING ALONG THE edge of the blinded windows as Reber Shelley finished dressing. On the night-table the thin hands of his alarm clock pointed to 7:20. His wife still lay asleep on the small double bed.

He had finished transferring change from an old pair of pants when a sleepy moan came from behind him. "You up already?" his wife mumbled. She looked at him from the quilted cocoon of blankets. "Seems like every morning you get up earlier."

"Go back to sleep." Shelley walked

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toward the kitchenette, hoping she would stay in bed. "I'll get my own breakfast, Melba," he called out to her.

There was no answer from the tiny bedroom. The man in the kitchen started the coffee percolator and poured some cereal into a chipped bowl. He lifted a window shade and gazed out on the hot pocket of the little town. Heat waves were already shimmering up from the pavements, but the surrounding mountains looked cool and remote. The mercury line in the windowsill thermometer already touched 85.

Shelley grumbled to himself as he poured the coffee. He could see his thin face distorted by the chrome percolator fixtures — the cracked, sun-browned skin stretched tight under the eyes, the dull gray hair matted and uncombed.

If only she stayed in bed. If just this one morning he could get out without her coming in and ruining it.

"Looks like another hot day, Reber." She stood in the doorway, drawing a dressing-gown cord tighter about her dumpy body. He hadn't heard her footsteps on the worn carpet.

"Yeah. Hate like hell to carry the mail in weather like this."

"Makes you sick, that job, doesn't it?"

He didn't look at her, but he could feel his face getting flushed. "Please, Melba. Please don't start that again."

"I'm not starting anything again." She came around to glare at him. Her round face was hollow and without character. "Let's thrash this thing out. Right now. All your life you been a mail carrier here. Every day you lug that bag — morning after morning — and what have you got? Look at you. Fifty-four and you look over 60."

"I can't help it," he defended himself. "I work hard."

"You listen! What have you got to show? Other people got nice homes and cars. Not us. We're still living here, but you don't care. Oh, no, not you! Up every day, put on the pack, walk down the road. Like an animal, that's what you are. They could have hired an animal to do the same job."

He raised a placating hand, but it didn't stem her flow of bitter words.

"And it's changed you too. You used to be happy, you used to whistle. I could tell you felt good 'cause you always whistled. But you don't whistle any more."

He slipped one brown leather strap of his mailbag over one arm, not listening to her at all. She clawed at his shoulder with one hand but he shrugged it off as he opened the door. Slowly he walked down the stone steps, his wife's voice storming out into the hot morning air.

"Go on," she screamed from the doorway. "Start another day just like the rest. Just like an animal. Go on!"

Walk . . . walk . . . walk . . . The road dropped steadily before him, slanting down to the dusty gray pile of stores that made up the center of town. High above, the sun had cleared the hazy rim of the mountains. His

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shadow was etched sharply on the hard-packed earth. Heat. Dryness. Walking. Always walking.

The post office loomed up. It was the first in the line of store fronts, a red brick building, neat and compact. He entered and said good morning to Lou Rolfe, a tall, wilted man who was the town's other postman. Pop Avery sat behind the stamp window with their two piles of mail stacked before him. "Hot day," he said.

The two carriers made a rapid assortment of the mail, then transferred it to their respective bags. They said goodbye to Avery and went outside.

Shelley watched Rolfe move off toward the opposite end of town before he heaved his bag on his shoulders. The brown pouch was like a heavy weight pressing down on his back. Ahead the road stretched past the post office and on past the five stores that comprised the row. A cloud of dust rose up and choked him as he started to walk. He coughed harshly and wiped his tearing eyes with the back of a chapped hand.

Walk.

The first stop was Tashman's grocery. Through the dirt-caked window he could see Tashman's loose, white-smocked figure bent over the produce scales. The store didn't look the same without the grocer's lanky son, who had helped his father behind the counter. The boy was now in Korea, and Shelley looked through the three letters addressed to Tashman to see if any were from his son, but there were no foreign stamps. The mailman dropped the three oblongs through the door slot and walked on.

Olsen's barber shop. Olsen was shaving an early morning customer. Above the pyramid of hair tonic bottles an electric fan purred softly. It's cool in there, thought Shelley. I could drop in for a few minutes and chat with him and stand next to his fan. But no, I'd waste time, might even get into the habit of doing it. Better drop my letters and go on.

He passed the other three shops in the same mechanical procedure. Look in, think about the folks inside, slip the mail in the slot, walk on. The bag felt heavier on his back, so he shifted its position. The private homes came after the stores on his route. He followed the dirt road as the sweat began to break out on his neck and stain his shirt. Walk over the road, the dirt road. He could do it with his eyes closed. Walk.

Think about something besides the heat and Melba. Think about anything except those two. Letters. Thousands and thousands of letters all delivered by him. A never-ending chain of sealed papers that would probably stretch for miles if laid end to end. Letters of love, of grief, of birth, of death. *Wish you were here. Will be home in two weeks.* And telegrams. *Your son is missing in action.* . . . All coming here to Cooper, Colorado. A hot, dry little town (population 276). A town with one sheriff, two deputies, four firemen, and two mailmen. Letters. Letters and letter boxes. Outside

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each home: a stenciled metal can with a red metal flag. A red metal flag burning with the heat of the sun. Here comes the mailman. Red flag up, red flag down. Each the same. Red flag up, red flag down. Heat. Melba. Walk.

He stopped at the first house, took off his bag, and rested briefly. It was a shrunken house, resting lazily on its foundations. The second house was slick and modern, freshly painted and gleaming with glass like an aquarium. All different, but in one respect, each the same. Everyone had its metal mailbox. Red flag up, red flag down . . .

And so the morning passed as he tramped up the climbing roads. Past playing children. Past talking housewives and friends he knew. Higher and higher on his twisting route, as if his last silver box lay somewhere in the sky. He journeyed on and the sun went with him.

Finally one house left. The realization flashed through his mind as he turned and looked down the countryside. Below stretched the homes he had left, linked in a chain of bright red flags. One house left. It sat on top of the hill against a backdrop of mountains: Charles Bywood's house. Bywood was the wealthiest man in Cooper; he commuted every day to his mill in the North. But most important, he always gave the mailman $3 at Christmas time.

Shelley removed the last letter from his bag and turned into the sweeping driveway. He enjoyed delivering mail to this particular house. Probably it was because the load was now gone from his back and the route was over at last. He liked to walk over the crushed white stones of the driveway and watch the circlets of spray from the spinners on the parched lawn. A slight breeze, fanning out from beyond a row of trees, cooled his face. It seemed that only the rich could afford the wind. The rest of Cooper seemed trapped far below, in the dusty bowl of the valley.

This morning he could see Mrs. Bywood lying on a chaise longue on a flagged patio in the rear. The silver frames of her dark glasses glinted in the sun. Shelley had almost reached her when a gust of wind flicked the letter from his hand and floated it across the lawn. It landed beneath one of the sprinklers. The mailman swore, stooped quickly, and retrieved the letter. Fortunately, only the back was wet, as he saw at a glance. The envelope was blue, with a black border, and addressed in a queer, slanting handwriting. Rather guiltily he wiped the envelope on his shirt and dropped it in the mailbox. Maybe it would dry, he thought, before Mrs. Bywood came for it.

Then he walked down the hill, watching the rays of the sun strike at the terraced homes. He knew the temperature must be well up in the 90's by now. His muscles ached and his neck burned. Down he walked and the town came up to meet him. At last his route was over — and he was going home to Melba.

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The next day was just as hot. His wife lashed out at him as she had done the previous morning. Everything seemed the same, yet there was a subtle change. As Shelley went into the post office, he noticed the excitement. Pop Avery did not greet him with the usual "hot day." The old gentleman was holding court in a group of townsfolk. He turned to the other mailman.

"Hear the news, Reber?" Rolfe didn't wait for an answer. "Mrs. Bywood was murdered last night!"

Shelley was puzzled more than he was surprised or shocked. Murders didn't happen in Cooper, Colorado. Cooper wasn't the setting, it was too small, too hot, too — well, they just didn't happen there. The only bit of violence he could recall happened four years ago when some kids had tossed a brick through Tashman's front window. But murder!

The mailman collected his pouch of letters and started out. The dusty street was not empty as it usually was. Small knots of people stood together, hungry for conversation. The barber shop had an overflow of customers, the bakery was full of talking women. Shelley pieced together what had happened from vagrant sentences he heard as he progressed. Mrs. Bywood had been lured to a secluded spot near the main highway, and there she had been strangled with a silk scarf. That was all. No one knew why she had gone to the secluded spot. No one had witnessed the act. The little mailman was disturbed by the fact that he had seen her the previous afternoon. She was so healthy then, so well-tanned and healthy. And now she was dead.

There were several letters for Charles Bywood, so he trudged up the hill to the house. The sprinklers stood idle on the lawn as a dry wind rustled the blades of grass. Behind the house, on the stone patio, the chaise longue was empty. A fleet of cars, their windshields marked with the stickers of Northern newspapers, was parked in the driveway. The mailman was rounding the bend of the walk when the Sheriff came out with two other men and called hello to him. Shelley waved, dropped the letters in the box, and started back down the hill.

It was 5:30 and he had almost reached the center of town when he made a discovery. There was still one letter in his bag, half hidden by an overlapping piece of leather. It was a blue envelope with a black border. The handwriting was unusual. Shelley looked at the address and dropped the letter in the mailbox of the modern house as he passed by.

Melba was unbearable that night. Shelley sat, head lowered, at the supper table while she taunted him about his job. He was glad when the meal finally ended and he could retreat from Melba's accusing eyes. He settled down comfortably in his favorite armchair, next to the open window, and opened the evening paper.

At 8 o'clock the doorbell jangled and Melba led three of her friends into the tiny living room. The visitors

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bid cold "good evenings" to the mailman and then eagerly followed his wife into the kitchen. For a solid hour, while Shelley tried to concentrate on the paper, the four women discussed the murder. Their shrill voices seemed to grow louder as the discussion progressed and soon an argument broke out. One of the women ardently defended her conception of The Strangler, as she called him; she envisioned him as a sex fiend, a man thwarted in love, who took out his hatred on defenseless women. Melba disagreed, saying he was probably Mrs. Bywood's secret lover who had killed her in a fit of anger. The argument raged stronger, the voices welling up against the warm walls of the kitchen. Shelley, his head aching with the sound, threw down his paper and left the house.

It was quiet outside. A hot, bright moon soared above the mountains, and there was a pulsing of crickets. A few stars hung in the sky. The mailman began walking, and his feet automatically led him over the same route he traversed every day. Houses glowed against the quiet hills, and light fingers of wind curled through the sparse, dry vegetation.

Up ahead was the modern house, gleaming in the night like a mirrored box. Shelley stood thoughtfully under a tree and stared at it. He had dropped the letter there that afternoon. Strange. There had been another letter just like that one . . . where had he seen it? Oh, yes, now he remembered. The one to Mrs. Bywood's home, the one that had got wet. But his thoughts were suddenly cut short. The front door of the modern house opened and the woman who lived there came out. She locked the door and moved off into the deeper shadows of the road. Shelley stood transfixed, watching her tall, lithe figure disappear beyond the brow of the hill. The little road looked empty but he felt another presence. He didn't see anyone under the hot glow of the moon, but he felt something, something close at hand. And then the feeling was gone, as if whatever had caused it had followed the woman up the road . . .

The next day, Shelley discovered that she had been murdered. Strangled with a silk scarf. The town was now in a virtual uproar. One murder was interesting; it had conversational value. But two murders left a strong feeling of horror. The woman who owned the modern house — her name was Kent — had been found earlier that morning in a nearby meadow. She had been a quiet soul, an elderly Latin teacher at Cooper High School. She had had a few friends, but no known enemies. And yet she was found dead in a dark thicket, with the silken noose around her throat.

As Shelley made his rounds he became more and more bothered by something. Not the fact that he had probably seen her walking to her death, but by something else. He couldn't pin it down. There were too many other thoughts in his mind — mostly the result of Melba's early morning tirades. Shelley was sick of

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them, sick of his own existence. He walked on his rounds.

But as he walked he continued to think. He thought about Mrs. Bywood and Miss Kent. He became so engrossed that he forgot the aching agony of the bag on his back. He walked past the row of houses beyond the stores, not seeing any of them. His legs carried him on his worn route as they had done every day for the past 30 years. But the silver letter boxes remained unopened by him on this particular morning. A mailman neglecting his boxes. No red flag up, red flag down this morning. Letters. They were the key to the problem, he knew. Suddenly he took off his bag and peered into its depths. Way down at the bottom was a blue envelope: a blue envelope with the unusual handwriting and the black border. Yes, there in his own mailbag was the answer.

Those letters were somehow connected with the murders! They were lures; on some excuse they got the women out of their homes to a quiet place where an unknown man with a scarf could meet them. That was it, of course! Whatever else the man wrote, he probably told his victims to bring the letters with them, and he destroyed the letters just as he destroyed the people.

Shelley paused. Yes, there was another blue envelope in his bag. And he was carrying it. No, he wasn't the murderer, but he was the carrier of death. To his mind came dim memories of the Bible he had studied in the cool cloisters of the town's church. Something about the Angel of Death swooping over. . . . The little mailman palmed sweat off his neck. He had figured it out. And in that letter in his pouch was probably the name of the murderer. He could take it to the Sheriff, he could get a small amount of fame in Cooper because of his cleverness. Maybe some of those reporters might even write him up, put the story of his life on the front pages of their big Northern papers. He could sit in his chair next to the window some night and read all about himself in the paper. Think of it! For once, he would be important.

If he delivered that letter, it meant certain death to the recipient. He, Reber Shelley, was the channel through which the murderer reached out with his silk scarf. He was an assistant to the Angel of Death.

He groped in his bag, turned over the blue envelope, and saw that it was addressed to *Mrs. Melba Shelley.*

For a long minute the mailman stood still. Then he walked quickly up the hot streets of Cooper, a small figure, sharp in the bright sunlight. He paused for only a moment when he reached his own house, then slipped the letter into his mailbox.

He hefted his bag and started back on his route. He was whistling softly. It had been a long time since he had whistled while he worked.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Sara Henderson Hay's "Mrs. Jellison" is one of the thirteen "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Ninth Annual Contest — last year's competition. It is a beautifully written story — an incident in the summer vacation of a twelve-year-old girl, as recalled many years later — and it is full of tenderness and nostalgia and a kind of lost beauty. The character studies, even the minor ones, are particularly sensitive, with a deep sympathy for lonely, pathetic people and a poetic understanding of the heartache and shocks that human beings are heir to . . . Yes, "poetic" is the word, for the author is one of America's ranking poets. She was born in Pittsburgh, but grew up in Anniston, Alabama, and she had her first poem published in the "Anniston Star" when she was only ten. In 1933 Miss Hay won the Kaleidograph Book Award with her first collection of poems, titled FIELD OF HONOR.

Shortly thereafter she came to New York City where for seven years she worked in the Rare Book Department of the Scribner Bookstore, and during this period she edited STEVENSON'S HOME BOOK OF SHAKESPEARE. *She also began to review poetry and fiction for "The Saturday Review of Literature," an avocation she still pursues.*

Miss Hay's poems have appeared in nearly all the major literary magazines — "The Atlantic Monthly," "Harper's," "The New Yorker," "Good Housekeeeping." Her second volume of poetry was published by Knopf in 1939, under the title of THIS, MY LETTER. *Her latest book of poems,* THE DELICATE BALANCE, *was published by Scribner in 1951 and received the coveted Edna St. Vincent Millay Memorial award for "an outstanding volume of poetry appearing in 1951."*

It was while she was working in the Scribner Rare Book Department, as David A. Randall's assistant, that Miss Hay became seriously, if vicariously, interested in murder as a fine art. She finds especially engrossing the psychological aspects of murder, the deepset motives, the twisted lives of the people involved; she likes particularly the fictionized versions of true crime — but with a creative little twist, perhaps a fillip of surprise in the climax or denouement. "Mrs. Jellison" is the first fictional result of her criminous preoccupation, and it is an auspicious beginning by a very gifted writer.

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MRS. JELLISON

by SARA HENDERSON HAY

RECENTLY, IN A JEWELER'S SHOP window on Madison Avenue, I saw a pair of wide, beaten-copper bracelets, and I thought again of Mrs. Jellison. It was not the first time during the fifteen or more years since I had last seen Mrs. Jellison that I had thought of her. My memories of the events and impressions of that summer of my twelfth year lay like bits of a jigsaw puzzle in my mind, their colors unfaded, their outlines distinct, vivid with that peculiar clarity which attends the remembrance of certain persons and associations encountered in early years. And, also, like the oddly shaped pieces of a puzzle at which the player may stare for a long time without seeing any relation one to the other, eventually, angle by angle and curve by curve, they had fitted into their proper places and the pattern of Mrs. Jellison and her husband emerged. It seems queer to me now, seeing the design so plainly, that none of the adults at the small summer hotel where we spent July and August of that year had appeared to be aware of it. But, then, I realized that I had probably seen and talked with Mrs. Jellison more often than anyone else had. The rest of the guests more or less left the couple alone, and the Jellisons themselves, as a matter of fact, had rather fostered this attitude, for they seemed quite absorbed in one another, and perfectly self-sufficient. After we left, my mother and father never once mentioned them.

The Jellisons ate by themselves at a small table for two in the common dining room, and except to exchange briefly the most casual commonplaces, they never joined the group which sat on the porch, or played bridge in the evenings. After dinner they would stroll up and down the various paths around the hotel, she with her arm through his, guiding him carefully over the uneven ground, for he was blind.

They made an affecting picture as they walked, the thin young man with the dark glasses that hid his eyes but not the shocking scars that furrowed the flesh beneath them, and the blonde-haired, graceful woman with the gentian-blue gaze and what was to me, round-cheeked and pig-tailed and further despoiled by the braces on my front teeth, the loveliest face I had ever seen. I adored Mrs. Jellison from the moment I saw her, instantaneously and without reservation. It was true that she inclined just a bit toward plumpness, but to my eyes this only became her more, and suited the clothes she liked — soft, floating dresses with lace and usually ruffles around the throat. She had the slenderest ankles and wrists imaginable, and on her wrists, accentuating the delicate bones, she frequently clasped a pair of heavy antique copper bracelets,

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burnished and shining, warm-hued with that color which only its own name can describe. I realize now how incongruous those bracelets must have been with the costumes she affected, and she must have worn them chiefly because they did so startlingly emphasize the fragility of her wrists.

My mother and father, having arrived after the Jellisons, were, according to the custom at summer hotels, briefed by the prior-established guests. Lingering on the outskirts of adult conversation, I caught a few sentences.

"It was a terrible tragedy," said Mrs. Cosgrave, who through phenomenal curiosity and shameless inquiry was able to garner an extraordinary amount of information about the various people at the hotel. "My cousin Alice, when I told her the Jellisons were here, remembered reading something in the newspaper about it, several years ago. It must have been a case of mistaken identity, because poor Mr. Jellison never had an enemy in the world. Such a nice young man, and the son of one of our most prominent families, too. Very wealthy people."

"What happened?" asked Mother, who didn't like gossip but who felt the question was required, as Mrs. Cosgrave paused and fixed her with an expectant eye.

"Someone threw acid in his face," said Mrs. Cosgrave. "Can you imagine such a thing! Scarred him dreadfully and blinded him for life. I think he *can* see a little, out of one eye, but not much. He's absolutely dependent on her, and I must say she never leaves his side. It was shortly before they were married, I think, that it happened."

"Heavens," said Mother, shuddering.

"Some women might not have wanted to marry an invalid," said my father, whom I considered at the time a hopeless cynic.

"After all, there was a lot of money," said Miss Abercrombie, tittering unpleasantly. I cast a furious glance at her from my outpost.

"As I was saying," resumed Mrs. Cosgrave, "they were married, about six months after the accident. My cousin Alice said she heard that Mrs. Jellison, or whatever her name was then, spent day and night at the hospital, at his side."

"Where were his family?" asked Mother.

Mrs. Cosgrave gave a hitch to her rocking chair and lowered her voice to a wheezing murmur which forced me to sidle as unobtrusively as I could from my shadows and seat myself on the steps in what I hoped was an attitude of utter boredom.

"He broke with them completely," she said. "My cousin Alice heard that his family was very much against the marriage. They'd done everything possible to break up the — er — liaison — but nothing had any effect. They would have cut off his income, if they could, but the money was his, on his majority. From his grandfather, I think. They did manage to get him away for a few months to their sum-

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mer place in Bar Harbor, my cousin Alice said, and there were more rumors that he was interested in some girl there, but evidently it wasn't so. Then shortly after he'd come back to New York, this dreadful thing happened."

"She was an actress, I believe," said Miss Abercrombie. "No one you'd ever heard of."

"Damn pretty woman," said old Mr. Pettus, creakily.

"She's at least fifteen years older than he is," said Miss Abercrombie, acidly.

At this point someone glanced guardedly at me, and with that tacit conspiracy of the elders to preserve the illusions of the young, the conversation shifted to other levels. I wandered off, kicking a pebble casually along the path, but inwardly I glowed like a candle before the shrine of Mrs. Jellison's heroic and tender devotion to her poor, disfigured husband. I watched them whenever they appeared in the dining room, she so gently solicitous of him, and when they took their evening strolls, bending toward him, her light, firm hand on his arm.

One day, made bold by my admiration of her, I said huskily, "Hello, Mrs. Jellison." It was mid-afternoon, and I found her sitting alone in one of the deck chairs which she had pulled into the shade of the trees at the edge of the lawn. She wore a light, flowery sort of dress and, though she was out of the glare of the sun, a large droopy hat.

"Why, hello," she said, and smiled at me. Her voice was soft and the syllables slurred a little.

"How's Mr. Jellison?" I said.

"He's taking a nap," she answered. "He always rests after lunch."

Overcome by her actual presence, I was unable to launch into any of my previously imagined conversations with her, so I sat tongue-tied on the grass beside her chair. She was leaning back against the striped canvas, her eyes half closed, idly twisting the cord of the little handbag which lay in her lap. From time to time I stole a glance at her. Against my will I noticed that there were tiny lines at the corners of her eyes, and that the soft full flesh under her chin blurred the lift of her throat. Defensively I pictured to myself the angular gauntness of Miss Abercrombie and the stringy tendons that stood out in her neck when she turned her head.

Perhaps Mrs. Jellison felt the intensity of my gaze, for she opened her eyes and caught me looking at her. She pushed back a strand of her blonde hair and said with a little self-conscious laugh, "I guess I look like the wrath of God today. I didn't sleep much last night, and it always tells on me."

"Oh, no, Mrs. Jellison!" I protested. "I — I think you're perfectly beautiful!" — and blushed furiously at my outspokenness.

She leaned over and patted my shoulder.

"You're sweet," she said. "Thanks a million."

She moved her shoulders slightly

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and adjusted the ruffles at the neckline of her dress. On her lifted arms the copper bracelets clanked deliciously.

"It may sound kind of vain to say so," she said dreamily, after a pause, "but you should have seen me when I was on The Stage. I was really pretty then. The Golden Girl, they used to call me." She was silent a moment, and I gazed at her raptly.

"I'll show you some pictures of me sometime, if you'd like to see them," she added.

"Oh, I'd love it, if you would!" I said. I cleared my throat, tremulously. "When you were on The Stage, was that — I mean — I s'pose that was when Mr. Jellison fell in love with you, wasn't it."

"Yes, I guess you could say it was then," she said reflectively.

"And then he sent you flowers and things and took you to dinner and plied you with champagne . . . ," said I, recklessly borrowing phrases I had read somewhere and woven into my dream of what Mrs. Jellison's romance must have been, "and then he asked you to be his bride."

She stared at me for a moment and then she laughed with what seemed to me quite immoderate amusement.

"In a manner of speaking, yes," she said.

She was still smiling when she got to her feet. "I'm going in now," she said, "but I'll show you the pictures tomorrow. I'll bring them out here."

While I was dressing for dinner that evening, I surveyed myself with considerable dissatisfaction. The bridge of my nose was peeling, and my hair seemed even less manageable than usual. I went into my mother's room, where she sat at her dressing table, and peered over her shoulder at my reflection in the mirror.

"I look like the wrath of God," I said despondently.

"Where in the world did you pick up that expression?" said my mother curiously, putting down her comb.

"From Mrs. Jellison," I answered. "I was talking with her today on the lawn and she said she thought she looked like the wrath of God and I told her I thought she was very pretty. I think *I* look like the wrath of God," I said, scowling at my mirrored face.

"It's a descriptive enough phrase," said my mother, drily, "but don't work it to death. It's been used before."

"*I* never heard it before," I said indignantly. "I thought she made it up."

Mrs. Jellison did show me the photographs of herself, and I described them enthusiastically to my mother and father as we sat on the porch the next evening.

"There was one of her in a line with a lot of other ladies," I said, "in little ruffledy skirts, like at the ballet. And there were some more of her in a shiny dress, with feathers on it, split up the front, and a tall feather in her hair. And one in a kind of bathing suit, only spangled."

"Hmmmm," said my father, glancing at Mother.

"They called her The Golden Girl,"

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I said. "Prob'ly because of her hair."

"Really," said Mother, politely.

"I asked her if that was when Mr. Jellison fell in love with her, and she told me it was," I continued, but Mother interrupted me.

"I'm afraid you're being much too inquisitive," she said. "I don't like to suggest that you could make a nuisance of yourself, but it just might be."

"Oh, no, Mother," I cried. "Mrs. Jellison likes me. I'm sure she does. She said I was sweet. Besides," I went on fervently, "I think maybe she's lonesome. With poor Mr. Jellison so — so —" I groped for a phrase and remembered Mrs. Cosgrave's expression, "so dependent on her."

"Well, see that you don't bother her," said Father, "hanging around underfoot all the time. What became of that little boy you were building the dam with, near the waterfall?"

"Oh, he's around," I said, coldly. "We'll prob'ly finish it tomorrow, since you want to know."

"Aren't you being rather impertinent?" said Mother. "I think you might as well go to bed."

I went, muttering.

The next day Teddy Jackson and I were working on our dam, a structure of sticks and stones jamming the narrowest portion of one of the small streams which fed the waterfall Father had spoken of, when we heard a rustling in the bushes. We straightened up, the stones we were trying to wedge into the largest of the gaps dripping in our hands, and listened a moment. The rustling began again and near the alders at the edge of the stream there appeared a robin, one of his wings drooping a little as he hopped desperately across the open space. Teddy whooped and drew back his arm. I pushed him ferociously and he teetered off balance, his arms whirling like a windmill, while I plunged through the shallow water to shore. The robin fluttered into a clump of bushes and found its way blocked by a tangle of dead blackberry canes. He was a young robin, nearly grown, but still young enough to wear the fledgling spotted breast, and he trembled in my hands, his beak open, panting.

"He's mine, too!" shouted Teddy, splashing across the rocks.

"He is not," I said. "He's mine. *I* caught him."

We had a few hot words about the legality of my claim, and finally I ended the argument by stalking down the path, the robin in my hands. As I crossed the lawn I met Mrs. Jellison.

"Look what I have," I said. "A robin. I think it's hurt a little but not much."

She bent over my hands, her eyes large with pity.

"Oh, the poor thing," she said. "What are you going to do with him?"

"I'm going to keep him and tame him," I said happily. "But I guess I'll have to tame him pretty quick or he may fly away."

She took the robin gently from me and looked at the drooping wing.

"I don't think it's broken," she said. "I wouldn't say for sure, but I think

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it's only wrenched or something and he'll be all right in a little while."

"But then he'll fly away before I have a chance to tame him," I said, my lips trembling.

"If you really want to keep him," she said, putting the robin back into my hands, "you could clip his wings."

My mouth fell open in horror.

"But it would hurt him!" I gasped.

"No," she said, smiling at me, "it wouldn't hurt him. Just the feathers, I mean, of course."

Up in my room I put the robin in a hat box with holes punched in the top and went to borrow Mother's scissors.

"What for?" she asked.

"To clip my robin's wings with," I said. "I caught him and I don't want him to fly away. He's in my room, in my hatbox."

"For heaven's sake, Cathy!" my mother said. "That's a dreadful idea." She followed me into my room and peered at the bird. "You ought to let him go, really you should. You can't keep a bird like that. You know we couldn't take him to New York with us; he couldn't live in our apartment. He'd hate it. Why don't you take him out and put him gently back in the woods near where you found him. He'll be able to take care of himself."

I took the robin and released him in the woods, safely away from Teddy, and watched him flutter into the bushes. I wept for him that night, thinking of his warm, speckled breast and his bright eyes.

My adoration for Mrs. Jellison increased as the summer days passed. I used to watch her, walking slowly with her husband after dinner, all softness and color in her flowery prints, with the massive copper bracelets on her wrists, and think how beautiful she was. They were nearly always alone. Poor Mr. Jellison, cruelly disfigured as he was, must have shrunk from any encounters with the other guests, and apparently she never urged them on him. If she was lonely, she never showed it; she was unfailingly gentle and affectionate with him, and he seemed to cling to her as if she were the spar in the shattering sea on which somehow he was still afloat. I don't know how wrecked emotionally he was by his personal tragedy, for I never talked with him, only with Mrs. Jellison those times I found her sitting in the deck chair while he took his nap. And once when she invited me up to her room. It was because I had asked her how I could polish some pennies my father had given me. I had conceived the idea of having holes bored in them and stringing them on a chain around my wrist, to make a bracelet as much like hers as possible. I worked on the pennies with soap and water and some cleaning fluid I had found in the bathroom closet, but they remained comparatively dull and dingy.

"I have something in my room that will shine them up," she said, when I told her my plan. "We'll see what we can do about them."

I followed her indoors, and we went up to the suite the Jellisons occupied. It was the most spacious the hotel

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afforded — two bedrooms, separated by a bath, and a living room. I thought it very sumptuous.

"Mr. Jellison's resting," she said, "but if we don't talk loud we won't disturb him."

I sat down and watched her while she went into her bedroom and unlocked the bottom drawer of her wardrobe trunk. She returned with a rather large morocco case, also locked, and which I assumed, rightly, was her jewel box, for when she opened it the sliding tray glittered with an assortment of rings and necklaces and pins. The bottom compartment contained three or four little packages, one of which was obviously letters, and another a wrapped bottle, which she took out and set on the table. The compartment was rather crowded, and as she shifted the packet of letters she said musingly, almost as if to herself, "I don't know why I keep these — I don't really need them."

This violation of my concept of story-book romance shocked me into protest.

"But Mrs. Jellison!" I said, earnestly, "ladies *always* keep love letters! They don't ever throw them away! They keep them and read them, over and over!"

She looked at me, a little smile twitching at her lips.

"But of course!" she said. "I must have forgotten. I guess what I really meant was I don't really need to read them again, because I know them by heart. Now let's see what we can do about your pennies."

She unwrapped the bottle and put it on the table while she went into the bathroom for a small saucer. The bottle was brown glass, with a screw top, and it had a label with big red letters printed on it.

I picked up the bottle and turned it curiously in my hands. Mrs. Jellison came back with the saucer and a little metal brush. She took the bottle away from me.

"You have to be awfully careful with this," she said. "You could get a terrible burn."

"What is it?" I asked.

"Sulphuric acid," she said.

She poured a very little from the bottle into the saucer, and holding a penny with a pair of tweezers, she dipped it in the liquid. To my great delight the dullness disappeared and the penny gleamed. As she finished them one by one, she put them onto the small china pin-tray from her dressing table, and then she rinsed them several times in soapy water in the lavatory sink. What was left of the liquid in the saucer she poured into the toilet. When it touched the water it fizzed furiously, and a little smoky mist and a faint acrid odor arose. She flushed the toilet twice to make sure that it had all gone down the drain.

My pennies were burnished to a beautiful brightness, as gleaming as the copper bracelets Mrs. Jellison wore, and I showed them in triumph to my father.

"Aren't they pretty and shiny!" I said rapturously. "Mrs. Jellison pol-

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ished them for me with something she had."

Father took the pennies to a shop in the nearby village, where the holes were bored in them and they were strung on a knotted chain, as he had promised to have done. I wore my bracelet constantly, jangling at my wrist. It made me feel a little like Mrs. Jellison, gentle and beautiful and devoted, and I thought tenderly of my robin, and how I would have taken care of him, if only mother had let me.

On the last day of our stay at the hotel, as we were getting into the car to drive home, I saw Mr. and Mrs. Jellison come out on the porch, he turning his poor ravaged face away from the others, she bending toward him, her light, firm hand on his arm.

"Goodbye, Mr. Jellison. Goodbye, Mrs. Jellison. Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye ... ." I shouted, hanging out of the window and waving frantically, my bracelet jangling.

I never saw them again.

EDITORS' NOTE: *Miss Hay's story is a variation on the case of the Widow Gras, who was convicted in Paris, in 1877, of hiring someone to throw vitriol in the eyes of her lover. Madame Gras made the mistake of using an accomplice; Mrs. Jellison was obviously cleverer — she agreed with Heywood, Lyly, Shakespeare, and Ben Franklin that (paraphrasing) "one may keep a secret only if there is no accomplice" — or as an old Arabian proverb has it, "A secret is your slave if you keep it, your master if you lose it." Mrs. Jellison did not think she was losing her secret by being kind to a twelve-year-old girl . . .*

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To the memories and the ghosts of Professor Craig Kennedy and Dr. Fu-Manchu . . . to The Lone Wolf and The Gray Phantom and The Clutching Hand . . . to Nick Carter and Philo Gubb and Jimmie Dale and Thubway Tham and Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford . . . to the "dear, departed days" and "the good old times" . . .

True, "our past has gone into history." "What's past is prologue" — "the days that are no more" are "a bucket of ashes." "Dead and gone," the stories "we had together." Should we then "leave the past to bury its own dead"?

NO!

Here is a tale "for Auld Lang Syne" . . .

THE CANDY KID

by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

LESTER LEITH, SLENDER, DEBONAIR, gathered the lounging robe about him and sprawled at silken ease.

"Scuttle, the cigarettes."

His valet proffered the case of monogrammed cigarettes with a synthetic servility which ill became the massive hulk of the man.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"And the crime clippings. I think I'd like to read about crime."

The valet, who was in reality no valet at all, but a police spy employed to watch Lester Leith and report his every move, let his thick lips twist into a grin.

"Yes, sir. I was going to speak to you about them. Your prediction has come true."

"My prediction, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir. You remember Arthur Millsap, the gem expert?"

Lester Leith puckered his forehead.

"Millsap . . . The name seems to be familiar, Scuttle. . . . Oh, yes, he was the one who was working on the ruby necklace for some rajah or other. He insisted on grabbing all the newspaper publicity he could get. I remember the headline, *Carries a Million Dollars to Work.*"

The valet nodded. "Yes, sir. That's the one. You remember he had his photograph taken with a leather briefcase in his hand. The newspaper article mentioned that he carried a fortune in rare gems back and forth from his place of business to his house. He was making a design for the rubies, flanked with diamonds. It was to be

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something unique in the art of gem setting, sir, and . . ."

Lester Leith interrupted.

"Yes, yes, Scuttle. There's no need to go into it again, but you'll remember that I mentioned he was simply inviting danger."

"Yes, sir. You said that Mr. Millsap didn't realize how businesslike the underworld had become. You mentioned that he would find himself robbed some day, and that his client would find, to his grief, that it didn't pay to have a gem designer who carried a million dollars' worth of stones around in a brief-case."

Leith nodded. "I take it, Scuttle, that all this is merely a preface to telling me that Mr. Millsap *was* robbed?"

"Yes, sir. Yesterday morning, sir. He went to work in a taxicab. He was carrying the brief-case stuffed with gems and sketches. When he opened his store he found a man standing inside with a gun. The man ordered Millsap to come in and lock the door, and Millsap had to obey. The man took the brief-case and started to run for the back.

"But Millsap hadn't been altogether foolish. He had installed a burglar alarm just inside the door, and he'd notified the occupants of adjoining buildings what it would mean when the burglar alarm sounded.

"He pressed the burglar alarm, and he grabbed a shotgun which he kept back of the counter for just such an emergency. He fired, and he fired low. Some of the pellets hit the bandit's legs.

"The sound of the shots and the noise of the burglar alarm made a terrific commotion. You see, it was early in the morning. Mr. Millsap makes a habit of being the first one to come to his store every morning. I believe it was about ten minutes to 8, sir.

"But there were clerks in some of the adjoining stores, and there was a traffic officer on duty at the corner. Naturally, these men all got into action.

"By the time the bandit reached the alley there were two clerks waiting for him. He ran toward a car that was parked in the alley and started it. But the clerks shouted to the traffic officer and he sprinted for the mouth of the alley.

"The bandit saw him coming, jumped out of the car, still carrying the brief-case, and dashed into the back door of a candy store."

Lester Leith held up his hand.

"Just a moment, Scuttle. You say he was wounded, this bandit?"

"Yes, sir."

"Bleeding, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir."

"Clerks behind him raising an alarm?"

"Yes, sir; and Mr. Millsap, with a shotgun, banging birdshot at him."

"Birdshot, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir — a size they call Number Eight."

Lester Leith blew a meditative smoke ring at the raftered ceiling.

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"Rather an unusual size of shot for a man to use in repelling a bandit, Scuttle!"

"Yes, sir, it is. But, as Mr. Millsap explained to the police, one is less apt to miss with a charge of small shot. And he was most anxious, as he expressed it, to leave his marks on the bandit."

Lester Leith waved his hand in a careless gesture.

"Quite right, Scuttle. Number Eight shot will make a most uniform pattern, and it's deadly if the range is short. What happened next?"

"Well, sir, the back door of the candy shop was open, because the proprietor was moving out some boxes and refuse. But the store hadn't been opened for business, so the front door was locked.

"The proprietor of the candy store ran out and locked the back door. The bandit was trapped. It took a key to open the front door and the proprietor had taken that key with him when he ran out the back door.

"The police besieged the place with tear gas and machine guns. They killed the bandit, riddled him with bullets, sir."

Lester Leith nodded. "Recovered the gems and closed the case, I take it, Scuttle?"

"No, sir. That's the funny part of it. The bandit had fifteen or twenty minutes in the candy store, and he hid the stones so cleverly the police haven't been able to find them. They recovered the brief-case, of course, and the penciled designs, and perhaps half a dozen loose stones. But there were literally dozens of the stones concealed so cleverly the police have been completely baffled.

"They identified the bandit. He was a man named Grigsby, known in the underworld as Griggy the Gat, and he had a long criminal record."

Lester Leith blew another smoke ring, extended the forefinger of his right hand, and traced the perimeter of the swirling smoke.

"I see, Scuttle. Then Griggy the Gat must have concealed the gems somewhere between Millsap's store and the candy store, or somewhere in the candy store, when he knew capture was inevitable?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the police can't find them, Scuttle?"

"No, sir. They've looked everywhere. They've searched every inch of the candy store. They've even searched the car in which Griggy the Gat tried to make his escape from the jewelry store. They simply can't find a single trace of the stones."

Lester Leith's eyes were bright now; and the valet watched him as a cat watches a mouse hole.

"Scuttle, you interest me."

"Yes, sir."

"The candy shop was wholesale or retail, Scuttle?"

"Both, sir. It's a small factory too —in the rear, sir."

"And the rubies were worth a great deal of money, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir. Of course, the newspaper account, valuing them at a million

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dollars, was exaggerated. But the rajah has offered a reward of twenty thousand dollars for their return."

Leith lapsed into thought once more. Finally, he flipped the cigarette into the fireplace and chuckled.

"You've thought of something, sir?"

Lester Leith regarded the valet coldly.

"One always is thinking of something, Scuttle."

The valet's face turned brick-red.

"Yes, sir . . . I had thought perhaps you had worked out a solution, sir."

"Scuttle, are you crazy? How could I work out a solution of where the gems are?"

The valet shrugged his massive shoulders.

"You've done it before, sir."

"Done what before, Scuttle?"

"Solved intricate crime problems just from reading what the newspapers have had to say about them."

Lester Leith laughed. "Tut, tut, Scuttle, you're getting as bad as Sergeant Ackley! Many times I've thought out *possible* solutions, but no more. True, Sergeant Ackley has a theory I must be guilty of something just because I take an interest in crime clippings. He keeps hounding me with his infernal activities, suspecting me of this, suspecting me of that. And he tortures the facts to make them fit his theories. Do you know, Scuttle, an impartial observer hearing Ackley's theories might come to the conclusion I was guilty of some crime or other." Lester Leith watched his valet with narrowed eyes.

The valet, mindful of his duties as a valet, yet recollecting also that he was an undercover man for the police, and anxious to trap Lester Leith into some damaging admission, nodded sagely.

"Yes, sir. I've thought so myself at times."

"Thought what?"

"How convincing the sergeant's theories are, sir. You've got to admit that there's some mastermind who is doping out the solutions of baffling crimes in advance of the police. By the time the police solve the crime, this mastermind has scooped up the loot and gone. The police have only the empty honor of solving the crime. They never recover the loot."

Lester Leith yawned prodigiously.

"And so Sergeant Ackley has convinced you that I'm that mastermind?"

The valet spoke cautiously, aware that he was treading on dangerous ground.

"I didn't say so, sir. I merely mentioned that sometimes Sergeant Ackley's theories sound convincing."

Lester Leith lit another cigarette.

"Tut, tut, Scuttle. You should know better. If I were this mysterious criminal the sergeant talks so much about, it stands to reason I'd have been caught long ago. You must remember the sergeant has had shadows to tail me everywhere I go. He's continually popped into the apartment with his wild accusations and submitted me to search. But he's

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never discovered a single shred of evidence. Surely, he'd have had some proof by this time if he were at all correct."

The valet shrugged his massive shoulders again.

"Perhaps, sir."

"Perhaps, Scuttle! You don't sound at all convinced by my line of reasoning."

"Well, sir, you must remember that it's the most difficult sort of a crime to prove, the robbing of robbers. Naturally, the one who is robbed doesn't dare to complain, since to do so would brand him as a criminal."

"Pshaw, Scuttle. Your reasoning is getting to be like that of the police. Besides, I think the sergeant is making a mistake."

"How so, sir?"

"In concentrating so much on the hijacker that he lets the real criminals slip away. After all, this mysterious mastermind of the sergeant's, no matter who he may be, is a public benefactor."

"A benefactor, sir?"

"Certainly, Scuttle. If we concede the man exists outside the imagination of Sergeant Ackley, we must admit that he makes it his business to detect crimes in time to strip the criminal of his ill-gotten gains. That's all society would do with the criminal if Sergeant Ackley apprehended him. The court would confiscate his loot, perhaps imprison him; but too often some slick lawyer would get him turned loose."

"Perhaps, sir."

"No doubt about it, Scuttle!"

"No, sir, perhaps not. But you must admit that you have a mysterious trust fund which keeps growing, sir. That trust fund is administered for needy widows and orphans. I understand that the fund has grown so large that you have to employ a clerical staff to handle its disbursements."

Lester Leith's eye glittered.

"Indeed, Scuttle. And where did you secure such detailed information about my private affairs?"

"Sergeant Ackley," blurted the valet. "He insisted on stopping me on the street and telling me his suspicions. He thinks you are just the type of man who would enjoy doping out crime solutions, levying tribute from the criminal, and then turning the money into a trust fund for the unfortunate."

Lester Leith suddenly began to laugh.

"The dear sergeant! The overzealous, stupid, blundering, incompetent! But we have digressed. We were talking about Millsap, Griggy the Gat, and a million dollars' worth of rare gems. Do you know, Scuttle, the crime *does* interest me. How thoroughly have the police searched?"

"I understand, from the newspapers and from gossip, that they searched every nook and cranny. They probed between walls. They poked under showcases, they looked in sugar bins, they poured out barrels of syrup. They took the upholstering of the bandit's automobile to pieces."

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"Did they look in the candy, Scuttle?"

"Where?"

"In the candy."

"Why . . . er . . . that is . . . I don't see how you mean, sir. How could one look inside of candy and how could a man hide gems in candy?"

"There were chocolate creams in this candy factory, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir."

"It would be readily possible for a man to melt off the chocolate coating and thrust in one or two gems."

"But the candy would show where it had been tampered with, sir."

"Not if it was re-dipped. By the way, Scuttle, go to this candy place and see if you can buy some of the chocolate creams that were on the upper floor of the establishment when the fighting was going on. I should like to examine them."

"Yes, sir. How many, sir?"

"Oh, quite a good supply. Say around fifty dollars' worth. And find out if there was any dipping chocolate that was warm while the bandit was cornered in the place.

"You see, Scuttle, the problem fascinates me. There are so many places in a candy store or factory where gems might be hidden. The proprietor may get his chocolate shipped in to him in large, thick bars. What would prevent a criminal from melting a hole in a bar of chocolate, dropping in some stones, and then sealing up the chocolate with a little dipping chocolate?

"Of course, Scuttle, I'm only interested in a theoretical solution. I don't want to actually recover the gems. I only want to see if they *could* have been hidden in a certain place.

"Now, Scuttle, I don't want any misunderstanding about this. Telephone Sergeant Ackley and ask him if there is any possible objection to my buying candy from the store in which the bandit was killed."

The valet's mouth sagged.

"Now, sir?"

"Oh, no great hurry, Scuttle. You might even drop by and ask the sergeant for his opinion. See if you can get him to scribble a note stating there's no objection on the part of the department to my purchasing candy.

"Better run along, and buy the assorted chocolates, Scuttle — and get an electric soldering iron. Oh, yes, Scuttle, you'd better get some of those hard red cinnamon drops too."

The valet-spy oozed his huge bulk from the room, clapped a hat on his head, and opened the outer door.

"Right away, sir. I shall carry out your orders to the letter, sir."

Sergeant Arthur Ackley scraped a spade-like thumbnail over the coarse stubble along the angle of his jaw. Across the table sat Edward H. Beaver, undercover man assigned to the Lester Leith case. The undercover man had just finished his report, and Sergeant Ackley was considering it, his crafty eyes filmed with thought.

"Beaver," he said, at length, "I'm

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going to let you in on something. We've recovered four of the rubies."

"Found them?" asked the undercover man.

Sergeant Ackley shook his head. He took a box of perfectos from the drawer of his desk, and selected one, without offering to pass the box to the man opposite.

"No, we didn't find them. We recovered them. Two were given to a girl and pawned. One was handed to a man who was mooching, and the other was dropped in the cup of a blind beggar."

Beaver's lips parted in astonishment.

"Fact. Girl named Molly Manser was standing looking at a window —. She says a heavy-set man with a cap pulled low over his forehead and a patch over his left eye sidled up to her and asked her if she'd like some of the clothes on display in the window.

"She says she tried to walk away, but he grabbed her arm and pushed a couple of the rubies into her hand. She claims she broke away and ran, but the man didn't try to follow her."

Beaver twisted his lips. "Boloney," he said. "What did she do with 'em?"

"Took 'em to Gildersmith to hock."

"He knew they were hot?"

"Sure. He spotted 'em and held her until one of our men got there. Millsap identified 'em instantly; says he can't be fooled on those rubies."

Beaver sighed. "Then she was one of the gang and they've managed to find out where the gems were and take 'em."

"Wait a minute," said Sergeant Ackley. "You're behind the times. We figured that, of course, and put the girl in the cooler. Half an hour later another pawnbroker telephoned in he had a ruby he wanted us to look at. We went out on the run. It was the same size, same color, same kind of cutting.

"This time a down-and-outer had brought it in. He was a panhandler, mooching the price of a drink. He picked on a heavy-set guy with a cap pulled well down and a patch over the right eye. The guy told him to take the stone, hock it, and keep whatever he got out of it.

"Then, while we were questioning this guy, the telephone gave us another lead — a blind beggar who had one of the stones dropped into his cup. Naturally, he couldn't see who did it, but he heard the sound of the man's steps on the sidewalk. He said it was a heavy-set man.

"Now that sort of puts a different slant on this candy idea, eh?"

The undercover man nodded slowly.

"Maybe I'd better switch him to some other crime."

Sergeant Ackley shook his head emphatically.

"Somehow or other, those four rubies slipped through. We want to find out where and when. This guy, Leith, never has missed a bet yet. If we can use him as a hound to smell out the trail we can kill two birds with one stone.

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"Besides, Millsap is raising hell. He's related to one of the political big shots, and he's riding us up one side and down the other. That's just like his type. They smear publicity all over the papers that they're carrying a million dollars around with them, and then squawk when they get rolled."

Beaver teetered back and forth in the scarred chair. His brow was corrugated in thought.

"Sergeant," he suddenly whispered.

Sergeant Ackley scowled at him.

"Well?"

"Sergeant," said Beaver, "I have it. I tell you I *have* it — a scheme to frame Lester Leith! We'll get the candy, just like he said. You've got four of the rubies that were stolen. Those rubies can't be told from any of the other stolen rubies. We'll plant those rubies in the candy and hand 'em to Leith.

"After a while, Leith will find those rubies. He'll salt 'em. We'll be watching him all the time, and we'll nab him for possession of stolen property, for being an accessory after the fact, and" — Beaver clenched and unclenched the hamlike fist of his right hand — "for resisting an officer!"

Sergeant Ackley grinned. "Make it for resisting two officers, Beaver," and he doubled up his own right fist.

"It'll be a cinch," said Beaver. "He's got off wrong on this case and thinks the rubies are in the candy. But we don't care how right or how wrong he is, just so we can get him with stolen property."

Sergeant Ackley shot his open hand across the table.

"Shake, Beaver! By George, I'll see that you get a promotion for this! It's an idea that'll stick Mr. Lester Leith inside, lookin' out."

Beaver shook hands.

"Of course, it'll be framing him," he said.

Sergeant Ackley snorted. "Who cares, just so we get him!"

Beaver nodded solemnly.

"All right. I'll get the candy and come back here. We'll dope it up with the rubies. You'd better write me a note I can take to him so he'll feel I've got results. Say in the note he can buy anything he pleases so far as the department is concerned, so long as it ain't contraband."

Sergeant Ackley squinted one eye.

"It's sort of a fool letter to write."

"I know, but it will make Leith think I'm shooting square."

Ackley nodded. "Go on out and pick up the candy. Bring it back here, and we'll stick in the rubies."

It took Beaver an hour to get the candy and the soldering iron and return to headquarters. Sergeant Ackley was pacing the floor in the manner of a caged lion.

"Took you long enough, Beaver," he grunted. "Let's get busy."

"The candy in the boxes?" asked Beaver.

"Yeah. Put the rubies in the top row, one in each of four boxes. Mark the boxes and mark the candies that have the rubies in 'em. I've thought of a slick way of getting the rubies

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into the candy. We simply heat the rubies in a pan. Then, when they're warm, we press 'em against the bottoms of the chocolates and let 'em melt in."

Beaver nodded appreciatively.

"Beats Leith's idea of the soldering iron," he agreed.

Sergeant Ackley sneered. "Leith ain't so brainy. He's just had the breaks, that's all. This idea of mine is going to put him where he belongs."

"My idea," corrected Beaver.

Sergeant Ackley scowled. "I'll let you have some of the credit, Beaver, but don't try to hog things. I thought of the idea. That is, I outlined the whole thing and was just pointing out to you how to handle it when you interrupted and took the words out of my mouth."

Beaver's jaw dropped.

They found an alcohol stove and a saucepan. They heated the rubies and picked up one of the chocolates. One of the hot rubies was pushed through the bottom of the chocolate.

Sergeant Ackley surveyed the result.

"Not so good. Looks kinda messy," he said.

"We can take this electric soldering iron and sort of smooth it over," said Beaver.

Ackley nodded.

"Watch out. Your fingers are melting the chocolate, leaving your fingerprints on it. We don't want that. Better wear gloves. That's the way they do it in the candy factories."

They heated the iron and held it against the chocolate. When they had finished, the result was hardly artistic.

"Well," said Sergeant Ackley, "I guess it'll get by; but we won't need to mark the chocolates that have the gems in them."

"No," agreed the undercover man.

He picked up the carton containing the assortment of chocolates. The last words he heard as he sidled out of Ackley's private office was a petulant comment from the sergeant.

"I'm not so sure, Beaver, that idea of yours is any good."

Lester Leith beamed upon the undercover man.

"Well, well, Scuttle, you have had a busy afternoon, haven't you? And you've done nobly — the candy, the soldering iron, even a letter from Sergeant Ackley, written on police stationery, stating that I can buy anything I want. That's fine!

"Now let's see if I can melt one of the candies and insert one of the red cinnamon drops. We'll pretend that the cinnamon drop represents a ruby."

Leith connected the electric soldering iron and set to work. When he was finished, there was chocolate smeared over his fingers, his face was flushed, and three chocolate creams were now sloppy, formless confections.

"How long did this Griggy the Gat have in the candy shop, Scuttle?"

"Not more than fifteen or twenty minutes, sir."

"Then he couldn't have done it, Scuttle."

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"Couldn't have done what, sir?"

"Hid the gems in the candy."

"Begging your pardon, sir. Couldn't he have done a better job if he'd heated the stones and pressed them into the chocolate, and then finished the job with the hot iron?"

Lester Leith stared at his man with narrowed eyes.

"Scuttle, have you been experimenting?"

The valet flushed.

"Not exactly, sir. That is to say, no, sir. And by the way, sir, while I think of it, I picked up a bit of gossip at headquarters. It seems four of the stones have been found by the police."

The valet told Leith how the four stones were recovered.

When he had finished, Lester Leith was chuckling.

"Scuttle, that's all the information I needed to give me a perfect solution to the crime."

"Yes, sir?"

"Yes, Scuttle. But, of course, you understand it's only a theoretical solution, and I do not intend to put it to any practical use."

"Of course, sir."

"And now I have some errands for you before the stores close. I want to get me four genuine pearls of the finest luster. I want a package of cornstarch. I want some quick drying cement and some powdered alum."

The valet was rubbing his jaw.

"Yes, sir," he said doubtfully.

"And, Scuttle," said Lester Leith beamingly, "you've heard of daylight saving, of course. What do you think of it?"

"It's inconvenient in the mornings, sir, but convenient in the evening."

"Yes, indeed, Scuttle. Yet a moment's thought will convince you that it hasn't saved any daylight. It's merely kidded man into believing that there is more daylight. The days aren't any longer. Man simply gets up earlier."

"Yes, sir. I guess so, sir."

"Yes, indeed, Scuttle. But it's a great plan. However, we shouldn't limit it to clock juggling. Why not carry it to its logical conclusion and have a heat-saving plan? Why not have perpetual summer?"

The valet was interested, but dazed.

"How could you do that, sir?"

"I'll show you. It's now the second of November."

"Yes, sir."

"Very well, Scuttle. You see that calendar hanging against the wall?"

"Yes, sir."

"Watch it."

And Lester Leith, stepping to the calendar, tore off the month of November. He did the same for December. Next year's calendar was underneath, and from this he removed January, February, March, April, May, and June. The month that remained on top was July.

"There we are, Scuttle. We simply set the calendar ahead eight months. We now have summer with us. See, according to the calendar it's July second. Think of what that means to suffering humanity. Summer is here,

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and we haven't had a single cold spell. Winter is over! Rejoice, Scuttle!"

The valet-spy sank into a chair.

"Have you gone stark, raving mad?" he demanded.

"No," said Lester Leith, pursing his lips judiciously, "I think not, Scuttle. Why do you suggest it?"

"But, good Lord, sir, simply tearing off the calendar won't make summer come any quicker."

"Why, you surprise me, Scuttle. You admit daylight saving gives us an hour more of daylight."

"Well, that's different. You said yourself it was merely a scheme by which men kidded themselves."

"Certainly, Scuttle. And that's all tearing off the leaves of the calendar does. Come, come, Scuttle, enter into the spirit of the thing. It's the second of July, and you've got the heat on. Shut the heat off, and then start out and get me the pearls and the cornstarch and the alum, and the quick drying cement. And you had better get a small crucible and a blow-torch too.

"Some of the things you'll have to pay cash for, Scuttle. The pearls you can charge. Get them at Hendricksen's, and he can telephone me for an okay on the order if he wishes. But get started, Scuttle. Even in these long summer days the stores close promptly at 5 o'clock."

"It isn't summer, sir, it's the second day of November."

"Tut, tut, Scuttle, don't be such an old fossil! Adapt yourself to the times!"

The valet seemed wordless with surprise, but he shut off the steam heat and slipped from the apartment.

Lester Leith opened the windows, and the cold of the late November afternoon crept into the room.

From a public telephone booth Scuttle reported to Sergeant Ackley and his report sounded strangely garbled.

Sergeant Ackley muttered a curse over the wire.

"Beaver, you've been drinking."

"No, sir, I haven't. I swear I haven't had a drop. Go on out there and see for yourself, if you don't believe me. I tell you he's gone crazy. He had me shutting off the heat just before I left. And he insists that it's July according to this crazy calendar saving time of his. Go there, if you don't believe it."

"By George, I *will* go out there!" yelled Sergeant Ackley.

Which was why, as Lester Leith sat bundled to the ears in a fur coat, there was an imperative rap on the door.

He arose and opened it.

Sergeant Ackley glared at him.

"H'lo, Leith. Happened to be in the neighborhood and dropped in to see you."

Lester Leith gathered the fur coat about him.

"Is this an official visit, Sergeant?"

"Well, not exactly."

"You haven't a warrant either for search or arrest?"

"Good Lord, no! I tell you I just dropped in."

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"Very well, then, it's a social visit. Do come in, Sergeant, and sit down. It's a little chilly for July. In fact, I don't remember when there's been a cooler summer."

The sergeant stared at Lester Leith.

"A cooler summer! Dammit, man, it's winter."

Lester Leith positively beamed.

"By George, that's so. I forgot to tell you of my new heat saving scheme. It's the same as daylight saving. That is, it depends on the same psychological factors, and it's equally logical.

"You see, like every great idea, it's simple. We achieve daylight saving simply by setting our clocks ahead. Well, I've achieved heat saving by the same method. I've set the calendar ahead. I tear off eight months and make it July. It's marvelously simple!"

Sergeant Ackley peered intently at Lester Leith.

"You're cuckoo," he said. "It's freezing in here. You'll catch your death of cold. Good Lord, sitting in a room with the windows all up and the thermometer down to freezing!"

Sergeant Ackley sat on the edge of a chair and shivered.

"Hello, what's the idea of all the candy?" he asked.

"Just a whim, Sergeant. I was thinking about that unfortunate robbery of Mr. Millsap, and I wondered if it was possible that the criminal had concealed the rubies in some of the candy which was being made."

Sergeant Ackley's eyes gimleted into those of Lester Leith.

"So you sent out and bought this candy. Did it ever occur to you that you'd have been in rather a bad position if the candy *had* contained the gems?"

Lester Leith smiled frankly.

"Of course, my dear Sergeant. That's why I had my man call on you and get permission in writing to purchase anything he wanted."

Sergeant Ackley's brows knitted.

"But it was all a mistake. The hiding couldn't have been worked that way. Have a piece of candy, Sergeant."

Lester Leith extended a box, and the sergeant took a chocolate, taking care to inspect the bottom before he sank his teeth into it.

For several seconds he toyed with the candy, going through the motions of eating it, yet making little headway. All of a sudden he stiffened, looked at the candy between his forefinger and thumb. Then he looked at the insides of the thumb and the forefinger, and sat upright in his chair.

"Something?" asked Lester Leith politely.

But Sergeant Ackley was halfway to the door.

"You devil!" he exclaimed. "You clever devil!"

And the door banged behind him.

Lester Leith gazed at the door with a puzzled frown.

Sergeant Ackley sprinted for the elevator and literally ran into Beaver at the sidewalk. He shot out a huge hand and scooped Beaver into an alcove.

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"He ain't crazy," said Sergeant Ackley. "I don't know what his game is, but it's the cleverest scheme ever pulled in a criminal case."

Beaver, his arms filled with packages, surveyed his superior with blinking eyes.

"Have *you* gone daffy, too?"

Sergeant Ackley shook his head.

"Look here," he said, "when we heated the gems and tried to put them in the chocolate creams, what happened?"

"Why we messed the job up," admitted Beaver.

"Right," said Sergeant Ackley. "Chocolate melts at about the heat of the human blood, see? Well, if you hadn't been such a damned fool, you'd have remembered the room was steam-heated. That's what made the chocolates messy! Now Lester Leith is sitting up there with the heat off and the windows open. The room is freezing. But look what it did to the chocolates! You can hold one of them in your fingers for minutes and it won't get sloppy. You could slip a hot stone into those chocolates and cover up the place by holding a hot iron near the chocolate, and make a perfect job of it. And you could do it quick!"

The valet-spy's jaw sagged.

"Of course! And the loft of the candy store was cold when Griggy the Gat was in there!"

Sergeant Ackley nodded.

"I'm glad to see that you're not entirely hopeless, Beaver. Now you get up to that apartment and humor Lester Leith in this heat saving idea of his. Give him all the rope he wants. Put on an overcoat and let the room get just as cold as he wants it. And be sure to keep your eye on that candy!"

"How about the candy that's still out at the candy factory?"

Sergeant Ackley chuckled.

"That's where I'm going right now. I'm going to have the police buy up every ounce of that candy, all the chocolate and all the mixing cream, and I'm going to put them all in one great big pot and melt them down. Then I'm going to pour off the syrup and see what's left. I have an idea we'll have the rest of those gems!"

"Meaning," asked Beaver, "that there are stones in the candy upstairs?"

Sergeant Ackley nodded.

"And we spent the afternoon putting more stones in it!"

"That," snapped Sergeant Ackley, "was *your* idea, Beaver. Now go up there and watch him like a hawk. When we get ready to spring the trap, we'll spring it right."

When Beaver entered the apartment, Lester Leith was wrapped in a fur overcoat, his ankles covered with a wool blanket.

"Ah, good evening, Scuttle. Back already. Do you know, Scuttle, I can't remember ever having seen a colder summer!"

The valet walked to the calendar, peered at it.

"Here it is July already, and cold. Sometimes June is rather cool, but it's unusual July weather, sir."

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Lester Leith smiled and nodded.

"Very well spoken. You got the things for me?"

The valet nodded.

Lester Leith idly reached for a chocolate cream. The valet watched him intently.

Lester Leith's hand went to his mouth. He pushed some red object into the palm of his hand with his tongue, and his face lit with a smile of satisfaction.

The valet knew it was not one of the pieces he and Sergeant Ackley had loaded with the four rubies, so he leaned forward eagerly.

"Something, sir?" he asked, his voice trembling.

Lester Leith dropped the red object into his pocket.

"Yes, Scuttle, one of the red cinnamon drops. I forgot that I had put them in the chocolates, and cinnamon drops don't mix very well with cream."

There was a knock at the door. The valet eased his bulk toward the door and opened it. A dark-haired young woman with a very red mouth stood on the threshold. Her eyes were sparkling from the crisp air of the winter night.

"Which one of you is Lester Leith?" she asked.

Leith got to his feet as the girl walked into the cold room and the valet closed the door.

"Heat off?" asked the girl.

Lester Leith held a chair for her.

"Yes," he said. "I am trying an experiment in heat saving."

"Well, you're saving it all right . . . All right, what are you giving away?"

Leith explained to his valet. "I telephoned a friend of mine and told him I had a gift for a deserving young lady." Then turning to their visitor, "I want to give you some candy. I made a rather large candy purchase on a specualtion which didn't turn out, and I'm left with the candy on my hands."

The valet-spy said, "You wouldn't give it away, sir —"

Lester Leith said coldly, "That will do, Scuttle." He turned again to the girl. "If you think your . . . er . . . boy friend would misinterpret the spirit which prompts this gift, I should be glad to deliver it to you in his presence."

The girl's eyes narrowed.

Leith continued, "I'll carry the candy down to a cab."

She was sizing him up with eyes accustomed to make fast and accurate appraisals. In the end, she reached the verdict which most women reached with Lester Leith.

"Okay," she said.

Leith loaded his arms with candy boxes and escorted the woman to the door.

"I'll help you carry some of the boxes down, sir," said Scuttle.

Lester Leith shook his head. "You stay right here, Scuttle."

And he led the way to the elevator, made two more trips back for candy, and then wished the police spy a good night.

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"You'll be back soon, sir?" asked the valet, noticing that Lester Leith had evening clothes under his overcoat.

Lester Leith smiled. "Scuttle," he said, "I am an opportunist."

And the outer door clicked as the spring lock shot into place.

The spy made a lunge for the telephone, where he called Sergeant Ackley and poured out a report which made the sergeant mutter exclamations of anger.

"Dammit, Beaver, he couldn't have given away *all* the candy!"

"But he did."

"And he went with her?"

"Yes."

"Well, I've got shadows on the job. They'll tail him."

"Yes, sergeant, I know, but how about the candy? The shadows will tail Leith, but they won't tail the girl after Leith leaves her. She'll have the candy, and the candy's got a bunch of rubies and diamonds in it —"

"Damn that fool idea of *yours*, Beaver. Get down and tell those shadows to forget Leith and tail the candy. Get me, tail that *candy*."

But by the time Beaver reached the sidewalk there was no trace of Leith, the girl, or the candy. Nor, of course, of the shadows. Following instructions, they had tailed Lester Leith.

It was well past midnight when Lester Leith returned. He scowled at his valet.

"Tut, tut, Scuttle, you have turned the heat on! Here I work out a new calendar arrangement that's to be a boon to mankind, and you spoil it all. It's July, Scuttle! One doesn't have steam heat on in July!"

The valet could only raise his tired eyes.

Leith softened. "Scuttle. I have some errands for you to do in the morning."

"Yes, sir."

"Ring up Sergeant Ackley and tell him I have a valuable clue on the Millsap robbery. Then I want you to remember our patriotic obligations."

"Patriotic obligations, sir?"

"Quite right, Scuttle. Notice the date."

"It's the second — no, it's the third of November."

"No, no, it's the third of July! And on the fourth we celebrate the anniversary of the independence of our country. I shall want some firecrackers, Scuttle, and some slow-match. You can get them all at one of the Chinese stores. They keep firecrackers, not as seasonal merchandise, but as a staple."

The valet sighed.

"Lord, sir, are you really going to celebrate the 4th of July on the 4th of November?"

"Certainly, Scuttle. I presume you are not attempting to criticize me?"

"No, sir, not at all. I shall attend to the matter in the morning, sir."

"That's fine, Scuttle, and I wish you'd get me a siren."

"A what?"

"One of the electric sirens such as are used on police cars, Scuttle."

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"But it's against the law to have one on your car unless you're an officer, sir."

"I didn't say anything about putting it on my car. I merely said I wanted one."

The valet nodded, then left, his expression more puzzled than ever.

For more than a hour Leith sat and smoked. From time to time he nodded his head as if he were checking the moves in a complicated game.

At the end of an hour he chuckled.

The morning was still young when Lester Leith was aroused by his valet.

"I'm sorry, sir, but it's Sergeant Ackley. You remember you told me to tell him you had a clue on the Millsap robbery? Well, sir, Sergeant Ackley wouldn't wait. He's in the apartment now."

Leith stretched and yawned.

"Quite right, Scuttle. The sergeant is only doing his duty. Show him in."

The valet opened the door and Sergeant Ackley strode into the room.

"Well," said the sergeant. "What's the dope on Millsap?"

Leith sat up.

"You doubtless know, Sergeant, that I sent my valet for some candy to the same firm where Griggy the Gat was killed after the robbery. I had a theory that the thief might have put some of the stones in the candy, and —"

Sergeant Ackley rubbed his tired, red-rimmed eyes.

"Well, you can forget that! Thanks to that idea of yours, I had my men put in most of the night melting down every bit of candy and chocolate in the place. And we got nothing — absolutely nothing!"

"Did you now?" said Lester Leith. "That's strange, because I gave away my candy last night to a very beautiful young lady. When I left her she insisted that I eat some candy, and would you believe it, Sergeant, when I bit into that piece of candy there were three foreign substances in the filling!"

Sergeant Ackley's cigar drooped.

"Three!" he yelled.

"Yes, Sergeant, three. One of them was a cinnamon drop I'd put in myself earlier in the evening when I was experimenting, and the other two were red stones. I feel quite certain they are rubies. And I'm wondering, Sergeant, if perhaps they aren't some of the stolen loot."

Lester Leith reached in the pocket of his pajamas and took out a handkerchief. In this handkerchief was a knot, which, upon being loosened, revealed two large rubies of such deep fire and so perfectly matched that they looked like two drops of jeweled pigeon-blood.

"Both in the *same* piece of candy?" asked Sergeant Ackley.

"Both in the same piece, Sergeant."

Sergeant Ackley framed his next question with a carelessness that was far too elaborate.

"Don't know where the girl is? The one that you gave the candy to?"

Lester Leith shook his head.

The sergeant turned to the door.

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"Going to see her again?"

Lester Leith shrugged. Then he said brightly, "You want to help me celebrate the fourth, Sergeant?"

"The fourth!"

"Of July, you know."

"Why, dammit, this is November."

"Oh, no, Sergeant, this is July. My new calendar calls —"

"Oh, hell!" stormed the sergeant, and slammed the door behind him.

Outdoors, he called the police shadows and gave them instructions.

"Tail Leith until he brings you to the candy or to the girl that's got the candy. After that, drop Leith and tail the candy. Get me? I want that candy!"

The police shadows saluted and returned to their stations. They waited for more than an hour before Lester Leith emerged.

Nor was it any secret to Lester Leith that the police shadows were waiting for him. He walked directly to them.

"Gentlemen, good morning. So you won't have any trouble in following me, I am going to get a taxicab. I will go directly to the Millsap Gem Company, where I will talk with Mr. Millsap, the gentleman who was robbed. If you should lose me at any stage of the journey, you can go directly there."

Leith engaged a cab and was driven to the Millsap Gem Company. The police followed, and watched from outside.

In the office Lester Leith became all business.

"Mr. Millsap, what would you say to a process which produced wonderful pearls at a small cost? The best experts would swear they were genuine."

Mr. Arthur C. Millsap was a heavy-set man with an undershot jaw and a leering eye.

"Baloney," he said. "You're just another fool with another synthetic pearl scheme. Get out!"

Lester Leith took a pearl from his pocket, rolled it across the desk.

"Keep that as a souvenir of my visit," he said.

The jeweler picked up the pearl between his thumb and forefinger and was about to throw it away when he caught sight of the smooth sheen. He opened a drawer, took out a magnifying glass, and focused it on the pearl. Then he pressed a button on the side of his desk.

Lester Leith lit a cigarette.

The door of the private office opened and a man entered.

"Markle," snapped Millsap, "take a look at this and tell me what it is."

The man nodded to Lester Leith, took a glass from his pocket, accepted the pearl from Millsap, and studied it attentively. After nearly a minute Markle pronounced his verdict.

"It's a pearl. It's not the best grade. But the luster is good and it has a good shape."

Millsap took the pearl from the man's cupped hand and jerked an authoritative thumb toward the door. Markle nodded once more to Leith and glided through the door.

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Millsap's eyes turned to Leith.

"You try to run a bunco on me and I'll have you jugged!"

Lester Leith took from his pocket a little globule of dead-looking white substance. It was, in fact, a combination of cornstarch and alum, dissolved in quick-drying waterproof cement.

"What's that?" asked the jewler.

"Another pearl — or it will be when I've subjected it to my special process."

Millsap examined it under the magnifying glass.

"Huh," he said. "There isn't any money in selling synthetic pearls."

Lester Leith blew a smoke ring.

"What's more, I haven't any money to put into equipment."

The jeweler grinned. "All right. Let's have it."

"You will announce," said Lester Leith, "that you have found a wonderful pearl deposit off the Mexican coast. That deposit will be there, and your divers will actually bring up the pearls. But I will have first planted those pearls where the divers will find them. We will market the pearls at ridiculously low prices, and then, at the proper moment, sell the pearl bed."

Millsap blinked his eyes.

"You mean to salt a pearl mine?"

"And rake in a few million profit from doing it."

Millsap looked shrewdly at Leith.

"It's illegal," he said.

Lester Leith lit a fresh cigarette.

After a moment, Millsap ventured another remark.

"If we were caught we would be jailed for fraud," said Millsap.

"*If* we were caught," admitted Leith.

The jeweler clasped his hands across his stomach.

"How would you keep from getting caught?"

"I," said Lester Leith, "would keep you completely in the background. You would simply give me sufficient money to salt the field. I would plant pearls in the oysters. Then I would communicate with you and you would discover the field. If anyone should intimate that the pearls weren't okay, you would have an alibi. Someone framed you on the deal."

"What made you come to me?"

"I read of your loss of the rajah's gems in the paper. I knew the publicity would result unfavorably for you and that your legitimate business would suffer for a while. It occurred to me you might be interested."

Millsap squinted his eyes.

"Yet, after what you've told me, you don't dare to go to anyone else."

"Why?"

"I'd know too much. I could expose the deal."

Lester Leith smiled. "That's supposing you turn it down. You're not such a fool as to pass up millions of dollars in order to keep me from putting across a deal with someone else."

Millsap sighed. "I'll look into the process and see how it works."

Lester Leith nodded.

"I'll meet you anywhere you want tomorrow morning and give you a complete demonstration."

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Millsap got to his feet.

"Tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock at my house. I don't do important business here. There are too many eyes and ears. My house is my castle. Here's the address."

Lester Leith took the card.

"Tomorrow at 9."

Lester Leith emerged from his apartment well after the sun had reached the meridian. He loaded his roadster with a miscellaneous assortment of things which seemed to have no connection. There was a suitcase containing the blowtorch and the crucible. There was a package of cornstarch, of powdered alum, of waterproof, quick-drying cement. There was another suitcase containing a large assortment of firecrackers, the long eight-foot bunches which are used by the Chinese to frighten away devils at funerals and to usher in the new year.

There was a siren, a battery, and an electrical connection. There were pliers and wires. There was, in fact, such a weird assortment as to make it seem that Lester Leith was going in the junk business.

But the police knew the unusual methods by which Lester Leith had managed in the past to solve crimes and hijack the criminals, and they watched Leith with cautious eyes.

And always the shadows were mindful of their instructions — whenever Leith should contact the girl, the shadows were to drop Leith and tail the candy.

If Leith knew of their instructions, he gave no sign. He ran the roadster down the boulevard, trailed by a police car.

The shadows were the best in the business. Yet the sedan which slipped between them and Lester Leith had been there for several blocks before the police realized that the two people in the sedan were also tailing Lester Leith.

Then the police dropped back.

The three cars threaded their way through the crowded streets and came at length to a more open stretch of the countryside. Leith's car gathered speed. The sedan rushed close behind it, and the police were forced to keep the needle of the speedometer at around 60 miles an hour to keep their quarry in sight.

Lester Leith slowed his car at a place where there was a vacant stretch of field, a bordering strip of woods, and a stone wall.

The sedan also slid to a stop.

The roadside was deserted. For the police to have stopped in that particular place would have meant they must disclose their identity, so they slipped past the parked cars. But they slowed their speed enough so that the two men who occupied the police car could see just who it was that Leith was talking with.

And what they saw brought smiles to their faces. For Lester Leith was talking with the girl who had called at his apartment, and the man with her was undoubtedly her boy friend. But, what was more to the point, they

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glimpsed boxes of candy in the rear of the sedan.

The detectives piloted their car around a curve in the road, and then slipped into the shelter of a stone wall. A pair of powerful binoculars gave them a good view of what was taking place.

Lester Leith seemed very well acquainted. The man was not quite as smiling as the girl, but the girl was effusively cordial. After an interval of conversation and laughter, a flask was produced, also a picnic lunch. The trio ate lunch while the detectives made notes of exactly what was happening.

Following lunch, the detectives received a surprise. Their instructions had been to shadow Leith to the candy, and, after that, to follow the candy until it was possible to communicate with Sergeant Ackley. But Ackley had advised them that it was a million-to-one shot that Leith would never separate himself from that candy.

Yet Leith climbed into his roadster and drove down the road, directly toward the detectives. The girl and her escort got into their sedan and drove back toward town.

There was no doubt as to the detectives' instructions. They took after the sedan.

The sedan hit the through boulevard some ten miles from town and started directly along it, traveling at a steady rate of speed.

"Looks like they're going right in, Louie," said the officer at the wheel. "I better drop you at the corner. Telephone headquarters, then stop a car and catch up with me."

The police car slid to a stop before a drug store, the shadow jumped to the ground, and was gone.

He notified Sergeant Ackley of the separation of Leith and the candy.

The sergeant got the location of the cars, their probable course, and ordered the shadow to get back to his companion as quickly as possible.

Within six miles, after commandeering a passing car, the detective joined his partner.

The cars continued their journey. The first important cross street brought them to a stop. Another police car slipped from the curb, ran alongside the following roadster. The two shadows identified the sedan ahead by making signs.

What followed was short and snappy. The police car left the roadster, forged ahead, abreast of the sedan. There was the sound of a siren, the motioning of uniformed arms, and the sedan slid to the curb. The driver leaned out to shout comments.

"Can't help it," said the officer in charge, as the roadster slipped past and was lost in traffic, "you folks have been driving recklessly. You'll have to come to headquarters and explain it to the sergeant. Bill, get over there in the sedan and see that they follow along."

One of the officers pushed the candy boxes to one side and sat down on the rear seat.

At headquarters in the private office

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of Sergeant Ackley, the sergeant gazed shrewdly at the captives before turning his eyes to the candy.

"Come through and come clean," he said.

"What," asked the man, "is the real charge?"

"Robbery."

"*What?*"

"You've got close to a million dollars' worth of stolen gems concealed in that candy."

There could be no mistaking their genuine astonishment.

"You got those boxes from a chap named Leith," said Ackley, "and the candy in them is loaded with the rubies and diamonds stolen from Millsap."

The sergeant opened a box, bit into a piece of chocolate, chewed it up, muttered his surprise as he found nothing except chocolate and cream filling. He bit into another, and the frown left his face. He twisted his tongue around, held his cupped hand before his mouth, and pushed a red object into the palm.

"Here's one of 'em," he said.

They crowded around him. Ackley lowered his palm. It contained a red cinnamon drop, stained with melted chocolate.

In the silence which followed, the girl's titter sounded like an explosion. The man nudged her, Ackley frowned, reached for another piece of candy.

Once more the sergeant drew a red cinnamon drop.

"He switched before he gave you the candy!" he said.

The girl was fingering the chocolates.

"I don't think so. This top row seems to have been handled, but the other row doesn't, and it's just in this box. Wait a minute. Here's one . . ."

Ackley grabbed it, broke it open. He pulled out a small object from the interior, and then let out a yell.

"This is one!"

It was a blood-red ruby. Then Ackley cursed again.

"Hell, this is the one I planted there myself!"

And he started breaking open the chocolate creams.

His hands became soggy masses, but he found no more rubies.

"Where's Leith?" he asked.

He might as well have asked the wind what had become of the breeze. For Lester Leith, taking advantage of the absence of shadows, had disappeared.

His apartment remained untenanted, save for the undercover man. His garage remained empty. Lester Leith was somewhere in the teeming city, lying low, waiting for his appointment with Arthur Millsap.

And Sergeant Ackley sat back in his swivel chair, blamed his subordinates, and cursed.

The entire staff at headquarters was munching chocolate creams and waiting.

Lester Leith, in the living room of Millsap's suburban house, set up a blowtorch, a crucible, took a package of cornstarch and some powdered

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alum from his suitcase. Then he took some waterproof cement, and sat cross-legged on the floor.

"Unfortunate robbery you had the other day," he said as he poured a small quantity of cornstarch into the crucible.

Millsap grunted.

Leith took a phial from his pocket and handed it to Millsap. His greedy eyes devoured the perfect luster of the pearls in the phial.

"We can make our fortune out of this," he said and glanced back toward the crucible.

To his surprise he found himself looking into the business end of an automatic which had appeared in Leith's hand while Millsap's attention had been on the pearls.

Leith smiled. "Take it easy, Millsap. You're dealing with big stuff now."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm a gangster. I use gangster's methods. I've got a mob that'll stop at nothing. Griggy the Gat was one of my men."

Beads of perspiration stood out on the jeweler's forehead.

"You see, you made up your mind a long time ago to steal those gems from the rajah," went on Lester Leith, his voice as ominously smooth as the purring of a cat over a dying bird. "So you deliberately arranged for a lot of newspaper publicity about how you carried a million dollars in gems back and forth from your work.

"Naturally I fell for it. I told Griggy the Gat to get into your place, collar you when you came in, and grab the stones. Griggy muffed the job, but mostly because you had it all figured out. You knew a clever yeggman would probably strike just when you entered your place of business in the morning.

"You're smart, Millsap, and that's why you always came to work a few minutes before anyone else showed up. You gave a stick-up just that opening, hoping he'd fall.

"What happened was just what you hoped for — that the stick-up would get killed in a gun battle with the cops.

"Griggy the Gat got the bum breaks, you got the good ones. The bulls looked all over and couldn't find the stones. That was natural, *because they hadn't been in the briefcase in the first place!*

"Then you made a fool move. You were afraid the police would reach the right conclusion when they searched every place they could think of and still didn't find the stones. You wanted to convince them that the gems *had* been stolen. So you started to put some of them in circulation.

"You were clever enough to know that the average person never remembers more than one distinctive feature, or two at the most. You pulled a cap well down on your head and put a patch over one eye. Those two things were obvious. The people you dealt with saw them, and saw nothing else. But you made a mistake when you had the patch over the left eye on one occasion, and over the right on an-

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other. Yet you fooled the police."

"What do you want?" asked Millsap.

"A cut, of course."

Millsap wetted his lips. "You can't prove a thing. You're a liar, and I'm not going to be held up."

Lester Leith glanced at his watch.

"It may interest you to know," he said, "that the police have at last reached the conclusion they should have reached several times before. Having decided that the gems were not concealed by Griggy the Gat, and having convinced themselves the gems were not on Griggy at the time of his death, they have concluded you didn't give them to Griggy. Therefore, they have decided you slipped over a fast one. So they took your picture, made a life-size enlargement, put a cap on it and a patch over one eye, and the witnesses have identified it as the man who gave out four of the rubies."

Millsap swallowed with difficulty.

"Baloney!" he said, but his tone lacked conviction.

Lester Leith holstered his gun.

"After all, it's no funeral of mine. I've decided to have the gang take you for a little vacation. At a signal from me they'll come in. You'll go with us. If you don't kick through with the gems you'll go for a ride."

Millsap squirmed.

"You said the police —"

Leith glanced at his watch again.

"Are on their way. Guess I'd better call in the boys."

Millsap choked.

"Last chance," smiled Leith.

Millsap shook his head.

"No. You're wrong. I haven't got them. I —"

He broke off. From the east sounded the wail of a siren, a wail that grew in volume.

"Save me, the police!" screamed Millsap.

Leith struck him across the face.

"Save you, you pudgy, cheap crook — save myself! Save my boys. They're out there covering me. If the police stop here it'll mean a massacre!"

Millsap dived toward a window.

Leith's fist crashed into the button of his jaw, sent him back and down to the floor.

"You damn fool. Keep away from that window. The police will walk right into an ambush. My choppers will mow them down. You know what that means. When they kill a cop there's always hell to pay."

The siren keened even louder.

"Seems to be right in my garage!" said Millsap.

"Then listen for firing," said Leith.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Poppety-pop-pop-pop-Bang!

"Riot guns!" yelled Leith.

For a space of seconds the explosions continued, and then silence descended.

Leith sighed. "Well, you've done it. My men were ambushed in your garage. They've wiped out the cops — a plain massacre. Naturally the bulls will give you credit for the job. It's the chair for you — unless —"

"Unless what?"

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"Unless I decide to take you into the gang. We can use a good jewel man."

Millsap struggled to hands and knees.

"I won't stand for it. I'll stay right here and explain to the officers."

Leith laughed grimly.

"Listen, fat guy," he said. "My men have just mowed down a squad of bluecoats. Think I'm going to get soft over one more murder?"

He took out his automatic, sighted it. His eyes gleamed with the fury popularly supposed to possess a murderer at the moment of the kill.

"No, no! I'll kick through, wait!"

Millsap scrambled to his feet, scuttled to the hall, and took a thick cane from the hall tree where it had been hanging in plain sight.

"Here they are," he said, thrusting the cane into Leith's hands. "Come on, quick. I'll throw in with you!"

Lester Leith shook the cane.

"No, no. You can't tell by shaking. It's balanced with sheet lead and stuffed with cotton. The gems are nested in the cotton. You get into it by unscrewing the ferrule."

"All right, Millsap," Leith said. "Better go out to your garage and start sweeping up the firecrackers. And you'll find a siren connected so that it would start to wail when a slow match burned through a connection, just before the firecrackers went off. I was celebrating the fourth of July."

Millsap tried to speak, but the sounds that came out were not words.

"Good morning," said Lester Leith.

"The . . . the . . . police!" stuttered Millsap.

"Oh, yes, the police! They are still groping in the dark. I solved the case because the police proved my suspicions by a process of elimination. You see, your inordinate desire for newspaper publicity made me a little suspicious at the first. Then when the police looked *everywhere* that Griggy might have concealed the stones and didn't find a trace, my suspicions became a certainty."

And Lester Leith strolled from the front door with all the ease of a man who is very sure of himself.

Sergeant Ackley was pacing the floor of Leith's apartment when Lester Leith entered.

"Well, well, Sergeant! Waiting for me?"

Sergeant Ackley spoke with the slow articulation of a man who is trying to control his rage.

"Get the stones?" he asked.

Lester Leith raised his eyebrows.

"Pardon?"

Sergeant Ackley took a deep breath.

"You ditched the shadows yesterday and disappeared!"

Lester Leith lit a cigarette.

"Sit down, Sergeant. You're frightfully fidgety. Overwork, I guess. No, Sergeant, as it happened your shadows ditched me."

"Well," growled the officer, "either way, you disappeared, and didn't come home last night."

Leith's smile became a chuckle.

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"Purely a private affair, Sergeant."

"Then you called on Millsap and set off a bunch of firecrackers."

"Quite right, Sergeant. This is the fourth of July, you know, according to my special heat saving calendar. I was celebrating. Millsap didn't complain, did he?"

Sergeant Ackley twisted the cigar from the left side of his mouth to the right.

"That," he said, "is the funny part of the whole thing. Millsap seems to think there isn't any cause for making a squawk. And I ain't satisfied about that candy yet. There are some things in this caper I've missed. That girl and her boy friend, for instance — couldn't even hold them, no evidence. Couldn't be they were working for you, Leith, in your pay?"

Lester Leith smiled. "Tut, tut, Sergeant, you *couldn't* have missed anything."

Sergeant Ackley headed for the door.

"Leith, I think you're a crook: Sort of a super-crook, a lucky crook — but a crook just the same. Some day I'm going to get you."

Ackley paused on the threshold.

"Next time the instructions will be what they should have been this time, and every time — *tail Leith!*"

And the door slammed.

Lester Leith turned beamingly to his valet, who had been standing by during the interview.

"Scuttle, I feel that a heat saving calendar isn't as simple as it seemed. Turn on the heat full force, and see if you can't pick up a new calendar somewhere. I'm going back to November."

"Now that the firecrackers are exploded," said the valet.

Lester Leith smiled again.

"Certainly, Scuttle. You wouldn't expect me to carry over a big investment in firecrackers, would you?"

The valet sighed resignedly.

"Begging your pardon, sir, I'd expect you to do almost anything — and get away with it, sir."

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edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

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". . . suspense . . . is tremendous, the atmosphere eerie, and the action violent." (FC)	". . . out of the ordinary. . . . Plenty of chills as well as fascinating data." (DBH)	
"The whole book is a delight." (LGO)	"John Dickson Carr . . . has mastered the short story as thoroughly as the novel . . ." (AB)	

KEY TO REVIEW SOURCES

AB: *Anthony Boucher in the New York Times*

FC: *Frances Crane in the Evansville Press*

SC: *Sergeant Cuff in The Saturday Review*

DD: *Drexel Drake in the Chicago Tribune*

H-M: *Brett Halliday and Helen McCloy in the Fairfield County Fair*

DBH: *Dorothy B. Hughes in the Albuquerque Tribune*

LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in the San Francisco Chronicle*

FP: *Fay Profilet in the Saint Louis Post-Dispatch*

AdV: *Avis de Voto in the Boston Globe*

EW: *Elizabeth Watt in the Boston Globe*

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In our August 1953 issue we brought you Lawrence G. Blochman's "The Girl With the Burgundy Lips," and you will recall that the author deliberately inserted twenty errors into the text, challenging the reader to spot the "boners" en ratiocinative route, so to speak. Well, here is another story by Mr. Blochman — this time, an original about Marshall T. Custer, demon detective-story writer and a devil of a deducer with clue and corpse — and again the author, with malice aforethought, has scattered errors throughout the text. There are eighteen intentional mistakes, with as wide a range of subject matter as in Mr. Blochman's earlier story.

Now, the reader may choose one of three approaches: (1) to read Mr. Blochman's new tale exclusively for its entertainment, paying no attention whatever to the discrepancies — in other words, letting the slips fall where they may; or (2) to accept the author's challenge and try to spot as many of the eighteen blunders as you can; or (3) to combine bloodhound business with perusing pleasure — that is, perform the neat trick of doing (1) and (2) simultaneously. No matter which approach you select, you will have fun, for this is one of Mr. Blochman's brightest and breeziest yarns.

If your final decision is either (2) or (3), we feel that we owe you a hint as to the nature of the errors. We suggest that (a) you keep an eagle eye on famous men, animals, and beverages; (b) don't pass too lightly over jewels or jurisprudence; and (c) pay attention to chemical, physiological, and criminological data.

But, frankly, don't be at all reluctant to read for reading's sake alone, and when you're finished simply turn to page 122 for the author's list of his own deliberate errors.

Happy hunting and/or relaxed reading!

THE MAN WITH THE BLUE EARS

by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

Telegram

MARSHALL T. CUSTER
C/O MYSTERY WRITERS OF AMERICA
228 W 24TH ST NEW YORK CITY

OKAY GIVE US COMPLETE COVERAGE ON CASE OF MAN WITH BLUE EARS. FOR YOUR INFORMATION BETTY MORNINGSTAR CANNOT BE MARRIED TO GEORGE ALADDIN EXCEPT BIGAMOUSLY AS ALADDIN HAD EVERLOVING WIFE TWO KIDS AND ONE ABANDONMENT CHARGE ANXIOUSLY AWAITING HIM HERE IN CALIFORNIA. LUCK. CARP

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New York, June 1

Mr. Benjamin Carp,
Managing Editor,
Far West Newspaper Alliance,
San Francisco, Calif.

Dear Carp:

Just got your wire and feel I should enlighten you on my sudden change of plans. As I wrote after the Greenwich Village case* was buttoned up, I decided to stay on in Gotham with the wise guys for a week or two to see some shows before flying home to my cozy little nest in the west to hatch out the new whodunit the world has been breathlessly awaiting. I had a seat on tomorrow's plane, so yesterday some of my colleagues in mythical mayhem dropped in for a semifinal drink or two. I poured the bourbon for King Burley and five or six others, nonchalantly picking a few brains in the process. We sat around, batting clues and alibis back and forth and exchanging false information about our sales and royalties. We were about three drinks from the truth-telling stage when the door opened without preliminary knocks, and a dove fluttered in.

"Oh, Mr. Custer, I recognized you right away from your photos," the dove said, fluttering right up to me. "Please pardon my busting in like this, because I'm not really one of those awful autograph hounds, although I have read your books and I just love them. I do want something from you, Mr. Custer, but it's more than an autograph."

"I guess we better get going," said Burley with a wink that was a cross between a facial spasm and incipient hemiplegia.

"No hurry," I said, but the boys put down their glasses in unison and looked at their watches. They were all late for dates.

While they were filing out, the dove made herself comfortable like she was going to roost for the night, and I got my first good look at her. When she first came in, I thought she was a stunner and that butter wouldn't melt in her mouth. After the second look I decided she was an ex-stunner and that maybe a butter-knife wouldn't melt in her mouth. She had a lot of tight little curls like twenty-dollar gold pieces (Remember, Carp? The Agua Caliente Casino?), only there's probably no danger of U. S. Treasury charges of hoarding because the gold looked counterfeit. She had counterfeit eyebrows, too, handmade, but her eyes were genuine. They were big, brown, dynamo eyes that generated little electric currents along my spine, running from north to south.

"My name is Betty Morningstar," she said. "Maybe you've seen me before."

"No," I said. "Where?"

"The movies," Betty said.

Looking at the tiny wrinkles at the corner of her jaw, not quite

* *The Girl With the Burgundy Lips*, *EQMM*, August 1953.

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concealed by her big gypsy earrings, I figured that Betty Morningstar's only connection with the movies was sitting by a telephone, waiting for a call from Central Casting — unless maybe she was an usherette in some second-run house.

"I don't see many movies," I said. "I make up my own plots."

Well, being a California girl, Betty said, she always buys the West Coast papers in Times Square when she gets homesick for the high fogs and the smell of eucalyptus leaves burning, and she'd been reading how I cracked the murder of the Greenwich Village model. So she thought of me first thing when trouble knocked at her door.

"And believe me, Mr. Custer, it's been knocking like mad. I think somebody is going to murder my husband, and that they'll blame me."

"Why would anybody want to kill Mr. Morningstar?" I asked.

"George's name is Aladdin," Betty said. "Morningstar is my stage name. George has been getting threatening letters every day for a week. They're anonymous but he thinks I'm sending them."

"Are you?" I asked.

"Of course not," the dove said. "But I did threaten him once, sort of publicly. About a month ago I'd had an overdose of Pisco punch, and I said that if George ever left me, I'd kill him."

"And he did leave you?"

"Well, we're separated, sort of," Betty said. "Two weeks ago George moved into his own apartment. No, not with another woman. We'd been quarreling some, and George thought it would help if we lived apart for a while. Then these notes started. They were pasted up from words cut out of a newspaper. The first one came a week ago. It said, *Your days are numbered unless you give up your evil ways.* They were all like that. The one today said, *Last chance to turn over a new leaf. Otherwise you die in 24 hours.*"

"Better take the notes to the police right away," I said.

"No, no. Not the police!" Betty said. "I'd never get another job in Hollywood if I got mixed up with the police. You know how they are."

She opened her bag and took out a handful of Washington, D. C., lettuce, all tens and twenties.

"It isn't much," she said. "Only two hundred. But I'm sure George will feed the kitty, too, if you can clear up this mess without the police. You're so clever, Mr. Custer. And in your books the police are never as smart as that private eye of yours — what's his name? Mike O'Sayme?"

"Michael Brayne," I said. "The only detective in fiction with two Ph.D.'s, double-jointed toes, and epilepsy."

"Of course, Brayne," she said. "You look just like I always pictured him. Husky and handsome with a strong jaw. You dress like him, too. I just love that red and blue checkered shirt, Mr. Custer. And your red sport shoes."

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"Save the soft soap," I said, as I finished counting the bundle of handsomely engraved portraits of Washington and Lincoln. It was twenty bucks short. I gave it all back to her. "Save the moola, too. I can't take it. But I can take an interest in your case, as a reporter. It fascinates me. Where do we find George?"

Betty's bag snapped its jaws on the money.

"You're sweet," she said. "I knew you'd be sweet. Let's go."

We took a cab to a dump in West Forty-fourth Street just off Times Square. We crossed a lobby haunted by dead cigar smoke and dead potted palms that had been embalmed in green paint about the time of *Abie's Irish Rose*. The open cage of the elevator shuddered all the way up to the sixth floor.

Betty thumbed a button and a door was opened instantly by a shaggy, baggy young six-footer with fuzzy eyebrows and drooping jowls like a bull terrier. Betty did a double take and backed into my arms. The shaggy young man said, "Where's Annabel?"

"Hello, Irving, what are you doing here?" asked Betty, when she had caught her breath. "Irving, I want you to meet Marshall T. Custer, the famous author. Mr. Custer, Irving Jeffries."

Irving tossed me a nod like an old bone, shook hands nervously without looking at me, and repeated, "Where's Annabel?"

"How should I know, Irving? Isn't George here? How did you get in if he isn't? And why should Annabel be here anyhow?"

"George is not here, but the door was open so I walked in," Irving said. "And you know damned well why Annabel might be here."

"Stop acting like a love-sick schoolboy, Irving." Betty pushed me past the nervous Cerberus and closed the door. "Mr. Custer and I are going to have a drink. Help me get the ice, Irving."

"I've got to find Annabel!" Irving started out, but Betty had a good grip on his arm and dragged him toward the kitchenette.

"Sit down and make yourself comfortable, Mr. Custer," Betty called over her shoulder.

I sat down but I wasn't comfortable. I didn't know if Irving's obvious jitters were catching, or if my gall bladder was plotting another uprising. Anyhow, I was damned uneasy. Something didn't smell right. I got up and started examining exits.

The bedroom door was open and so was the bathroom on the far side. Nobody in sight. The window looking out on the fire escape was locked. There was a door right behind me that might be a closet. I got up and turned the knob. The door started to open immediately, as if someone was pushing from the inside. I pushed back, but I was off balance and the door swung further open until a man lurched out sideways. I still held the knob, and the man's shoulder hit me in the chest with

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the deadweight impact of a side of beef. I let go of the knob, grabbed the man with both arms, and thrust him away from me, into the closet. He went over backward like a weighted toy, until his shoulders leaned wearily against a rack of coats and his weight rested on his heels, with his toes pointing up at my belt buckle. Wire coat-hangers jangled as he stared at me with dead eyes.

In the kitchenette Irving was saying, "I don't know what could have happened to Annabel. If that senile lecher took her to your apartment, Betty, I think I could strangle you and George both."

"Irving darling," Betty said, "just because you're in love with a bird brain, do you have to talk like a mentally arrested chickadee?"

I was looking at the dead man. He had a rather handsome, dissipated face with graying temples and dark, wavy hair. He also had blue ears. Both ears were blue right down to the lobes — the damnedest, most startling shade of blue I ever saw. I shut the closet door quickly.

When Betty and Irving came in with glasses, ice, and bottles, I was trying to light a cigarette with somebody else's fingers which were three sizes too big for me. Irving passed me his lighter.

"You must like Pisco punch, Mr. Custer, because you're from California. George says all San Franciscans adore anything made with Brazilian brandy. You do adore it, too, don't you?"

"I was weaned on it," I said. "Pisco punch and llama's milk."

Irving started edging for the exit. "Well," he began.

"Sit down, Irving, and give the ants a rest," Betty said.

The door buzzer whined and Irving was off like a whippet.

"Annabel!" he exclaimed to the open door. The object of his affections was invisible to us because she was entirely absorbed in his manly bosom and wrapped in his eager embrace.

When he finally came up for air and wiped the lipstick off his mouth and neck and cheeks, I could observe that Annabel was a little bit of a girl with enough of everything for two, standard size. She had that rare starry-eyed innocence you find only in the one pretty girl in ten thousand who doesn't know she is beautiful. She had transferred all her lipstick to Irving, but her lips were still as red as lapis lazuli. Her eyes were big and blue and trusting. All in all, she was as refreshing as the cool, sweet scent of clover on an August evening, and I wondered what the hell she had to do with the dead man in the closet.

"Annabel!" Irving repeated. "You said you were coming early."

"I did come early," Annabel said. "But George wasn't here so I went out for an ice cream soda with Mr. Newsom."

"Newsom?" Irving made a face like a man who had bitten into a bitter olive he had picked off the tree

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himself. "Do I have to protect you from Frank Newsom, too?"

"Be your age, Irving," Betty said. "Annabel is one of the sweetest, purest, most undeveloped minds east of the Rockies, but one day she's bound to find out that babies don't come from the Stork Club. So —"

"Mr. Newsom is very nice," Annabel said.

"Sure," Irving said. "Did he tell you a beautiful girl like you belonged in Hollywood and that he was going to put you in pictures?"

"Why, Irving, how did you know?"

"Irving knows everything," Betty volunteered. "He has twice as much brains as most people to make up for some who don't have any at all. Sit down and relax, Irving, after all that brain work."

"We're leaving," Irving said. "Come on, Annabel."

After the loving couple had gone, Betty handed me a drink and leaned back in her chair. I wondered how and when she was going to introduce the man with the blue ears standing so quietly in the closet, but she seemed in no hurry. She told me all about Irving Jeffries, who it seems was just a hardboiled softie. He had been a high-powered Broadway press agent until his tizzy over Annabel loomed to menace his career. Protecting the beautiful little country girl from the pitfalls of the wicked city took so much time that he was neglecting columnists and city editors. What's more, it was a life-long job, because Annabel's mental equipment would require at least two years' hard study to master even the rudiments of being a hat-check girl.

"Look how Irving worries about Frank Newsom, for instance," Betty said. "Of course Newsom may have an eye for cute little girls, sort of, but he never met Annabel before today. I wonder where George could be."

"Let's stop the kidding," I said. "You know very well where George is. He's in that closet behind you."

"Silly!" Betty said. "Why would George be hiding?"

"He's dead," I told her. "He was probably dead before you came to get me. Rigor mortis has set in, and rigor never sets in until two hours after death. George is stiff as a board."

"Stiff?" Betty laughed. "I get it, Mr. Custer. You slay me."

"And he's got blue ears," I added.

"Blue ears!" Betty emptied her glass at one gulp. She got up and opened the closet.

"George, stop your fooling." She grabbed the man's arm. He twisted around as he fell forward, landing on his back with a thump.

Betty didn't scream. She just keeled over silently. I splashed some water in her face and forced a little of the Pisco punch between her teeth. She came to with a sputter.

"Better make up your face and a good story before the cops come," I said.

"You can't leave me like this, Mr. Custer!" she wailed.

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"I got errands," I said. "I'll be back when you hear sirens."

I went downstairs and called the police from a phone booth, giving Aladdin's address. Then I drafted that long wire to you.

Looks like Californians are all coming East to get murdered these days. Will you be heading for New York soon to see some new shows, Carp?

Yours in crime,
MARSHALL T. CUSTER

New York, June 2

Mr. Benjamin Carp,
Far West Newspaper Alliance,
San Francisco, Calif.

Dear Carp:

A lot of firewater has flowed under my bridges since I filed my story last night, and it looks like a lot of fireworks are due before I file the next. So here's a little more side-bar stuff pending my trip to the morgue to dig up some new angles.

After wiring you, I went back to George Aladdin's apartment and found it already cluttered up with The Law and Betty Morningstar's hysterics. The cops and the Medical Examiner's men were climbing all over each other while Betty was howling her little tonsils out in the bathroom, hoping she had an audience. And of the four dozen police dicks with New York's homicide bureau, Carp, who do you suppose was bossing the case? Right as ever, Carp. Our old friend Kenneth Kilkenny, detective first grade. He was giving his lips a heat treatment with a half-inch cigarette butt while he gave me the cold twice-over from under the brim of his slouch hat. I administered the hearty old-pal backslapping routine.

"Just like old times, Kilkenny," I said. "Sorry I'm late for your shiny new murder."

"It ain't my murder," he said, "and you ain't late. You were here first."

"Nice deduction," I said. "Find my knuckle-prints on the corpse's teeth?"

"I find the corpse's ear-prints on your right mitt."

I looked at my right hand. Then I looked again. There was a bright blue streak across the palm — the same bright blue as the ears of the late G. Aladdin. I laughed, while trying to think where I'd picked up the blue streak. I hadn't touched the dead man's ears and I could have sworn that Betty wasn't blue in any place that I'd touched. Maybe the knob of the closet door . . .

"Funny part is," Kilkenny went on, "the blue don't come off of Aladdin's ears. What the hell is this, Custer?"

"A blue mackerel," I said, "closely allied to the red herring."

"You ought to out-sleuth yourself on this case, Custer," Kilkenny said. "You got a blonde with pretty legs, just like in your books, and she's deep in murder up to her ears — ha, ha."

Betty Morningstar stopped crying

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immediately and popped out of the bathroom. She must have been working hard with powder and lipstick during her fit of weeping, because her make-up covered all signs of grief.

"Me?" she asked. "Why me, Officer?"

"You sent him these," Kilkenny said, producing a sheaf of papers. He was a fast worker. He'd already found the anonymous death threats Betty had told me about.

"But why *me*, Officer?" Betty looked scared.

"Jealousy," Kilkenny said, looking at Betty's wrinkles. "Aladdin gave you the breeze for a younger mouse."

"You silly!" Betty said. "George has a wife in California."

"That's grounds for murder in some states," Kilkenny said.

At this point a cop announced there was a man outside named Newsom who wanted to see Mr. Aladdin. Kilkenny nodded and I had my first look at Frank Newsom. He was a dapper little guy, expensively tailored, with a mop of white hair, a pink rosebud mouth topped by a gray tooth-brush mustache, and bristly gray eyebrows to match. He hid his eyes behind thick no-glare lenses. Both hands had been freshly bandaged.

"Glad you dropped in, Newsom," Kilkenny said. "You were one of the three people the desk clerk says asked for Mr. Aladdin this afternoon, to say nothing of the couple that bypassed the desk on their way up. Why did you come back?"

"Mr. Aladdin wasn't in when I first called," Newsom said.

"He's in now," Kilkenny said. "Take a look."

When Newsom saw the corpse his head bobbed, his knees wobbled, and if his coccyx hadn't caught on the edge of a chair, he would have collapsed on the floor. He sat for a moment shaking all over and muttering, "Blue ears! Oh, lord! Blue ears!"

"The Black Hand I know," Kilkenny said. "Tell me about the Blue Ear."

It took Newsom another two minutes to wipe the fog off his goggles and organize his trembling lips so that the bubbling sounds would come out like words.

"Arrest me, Officer," he said finally. "I don't know what caused this tragic accident — and it is an accident — but I accept full blame. Serves me right for authorizing the hoax. I should have known better than to toy with the law for publicity purposes, but I did okay the plan, so I'm responsible for Aladdin's death."

"Keep talking," Kilkenny said.

Newsom said he'd arrived in New York that morning for the world première of a picture he owned. The Poverty Row producer who made it couldn't pay the lab for prints, so Newsom had bought the film for peanuts. It was a quickie, with no box-office names, but hot publicity might put it into the money. So Newsom hired Irving Jeffries by long-distance phone, and

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wired Betty Morningstar (who had a bit part in the film) to cooperate.

Irving's publicity stunt was simple. Betty and George Aladdin were to stage a battling-husband-and-wife act, following which Aladdin was to get anonymous death threats for a week. Betty was to suck me into the hoax to insure West Coast coverage. Then Aladdin was to be found unconscious — with blue ears! The coma, as scheduled, was harmless enough: just enough sleeping pills to keep George snoring until he'd been taken to the hospital and the police were notified. The blue ears and the death notes were bound to get George into the newspapers. Then, when George was feeling fine again, the advertising for Newsom's picture would break out like the measles.

The title of Newsom's film is — shuck's, Carp, you guessed it! — *The Man With the Blue Ears.*

"What went wrong?" Newsom moaned. "Did Mr. Aladdin take too many pills? Were the pills he took poisonous just to him? Is that possible?"

"Sure," I said. "Allergic shock. Anaptyxis."

"Watch your language, Custer," Kilkenny said. "There's ladies present."

"I never saw poor Aladdin before he came to my hotel this morning," Newsom said, "but his death is a shock to me. And I don't want innocent people involved. You'll let the others go, won't you?"

"Sure," Kilkenny said. "Custer and the babe can go right now — as far as the kitchenette. I want to talk to you alone, Newsom. How did you hurt your hands? Casting a new film?"

"When the porter brought up my trunk this morning after Mr. Aladdin left," Newsom explained, "he seemed to be having trouble with it and I tried to help him. The trunk slipped and gashed both my hands. No fingers broken, the house physician says, but he put on the bandages to avoid infection."

I leaned closer to look, and Kilkenny barked, "I said 'alone,' Custer. Tuck that babe under your arm, shut yourself in the kitchenette, and scramble a few clues. Goodbye now."

When the kitchenette door closed, Betty said, "I feel awful about George, but I'm glad it's an accident and we can all go."

"Don't be a sap," I said. "Even Kilkenny must wonder how a guy who is dying from an overdose of sleeping pills can stand himself in a closet and shut the door just before becoming a corpse. Who was the ear-painter in this set-up?"

"Irving," Betty said. "He has the dyes at home."

"Where does this door lead to?" I asked.

"The service stairway. I suppose it's watched."

"Let's try," I said. I stuck my head out. The coast was clear. I set Betty in motion with a little pat. We then went down three flights of service stairs and walked down a long cor-

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ridor to the passenger elevator. As we got off at the lobby floor, I saw four uniformed cops lurking among the dead potted palms. One of the bulls was measuring me with his eyes for a felony complaint, so I walked up to him and said,

"Officer, could you tell me what all the police are doing on the upper floors of this hotel?"

"This ain't no quiz program," the cop said. "Keep moving."

We kept moving. I got Betty into a taxi. I escorted her to my modest little caravanserai where she curled up like a kitten on the love seat, nibbling prettily on my bourbon while I beat the keys off my typewriter. She did not look in the least blue, even about the ears.

Hoping your own ears remain clean and pink, Carp, I am

Yours in crime,

MARSHALL T. CUSTER

New York, June 3

Benjamin Carp, Esq.,
Far West Newspaper Alliance,
San Francisco, Calif.

Dear Carp:

Please excuse gimpy typing, but I have a large and painful bite on my right typewriter finger. In fact, I would phone you long-distance and dictate this, except that I am not speaking very clearly either, what with a swollen jaw and two front molars that rattle.

Let me explain. I finished my letter to you in a dead heat with Betty and the bourbon, and then suggested we visit Irving's domicile.

"Irving won't be home now," Betty said. "He'll be waiting for Annabel at the Broadway Academy of Charm and Personality. Annabel spends three nights a week there, walking with a book on her head and learning how to sit down like a lady."

Irving was not at the Academy of Charm. It seems Annabel was playing hooky. So we went to Irving's brownstone walk-up in the West Eighties. A taxi stood in front of the address, flag down and engine running. The girl in the back seat was so busy making herself invisible that she didn't see us. It was Annabel.

We hurried up one flight of stairs and ran smack into Irving coming through his front door with a suitcase in each hand.

"Glad we caught you, Irving," I said. "I got questions."

Irving answered with actions, which, as you know, Carp, speak louder than words. He dropped the bags and shot a straight right to my chin. The dimensions of Irving's fist are such that it not only caused severe shock to the jaw but also damaged two of my lower left front teeth. I was badly shaken but I reacted.

You may remember, Carp, that in all my books Michael Brayne, the Private Eye, always takes a head chancery on his opponent when attacked, unless he can first grab hold of a leg for a hammer lock. So I took a chancery on Irving, catching his

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head in the vise-like angle of my right elbow with the back or bony part of my forearm pressed firmly across his face. However, because of Irving's height and my dazed condition, the forearm crossed his face low and to the right, so he was able to bite. He bit deeply into my right forefinger and chewed vigorously. That broke the hold.

Irving straight-armed Betty and she sat down on the stairs. He smacked the other side of my jaw and I sat down on Betty. He then ran down the stairs without so much as saying goodbye.

When I got to my feet I could hear the taxi driving away, so I said to Betty, "Irving has done us the favor of leaving his door open, so let's step inside and look for bodies."

It didn't take long to find what I wanted — three bottles of bright blue dye. The brands were different, but all three were guaranteed to be pure and harmless vegetable coloring, certified to conform to the U. S. Food and Drugs Act. That canceled out my theory that the dye might have been Prussian blue, which contains arsenic.

I had Betty hold out her hands and made a blue streak on them from each bottle. Then I took out my watch. In five minutes all three streaks were dry and would not rub off. One was the same shade of blue as Aladdin's ears.

"Well, that settles that," I said.

"Settles what?" Kilkenny's voice said behind me. "You didn't stay settled in the kitchenette like I told you, Custer."

"We weren't hungry," I said. "And I had work to do."

"Work!" Kilkenny sniffed. "This still ain't the amateur hour. . . . Gee zuzz! Now you're beginning to look like a story-book shamus, Custer. What hit you? A beer truck?"

"A murder suspect," I said, "who at this moment is probably boarding a plane at LaGuardia Field for Mexico or Cuba."

"For Clinton, Missouri," Betty corrected. "That's Annabel's home."

"If I were you, Kilkenny, I'd hop out to LaGuardia Field —"

"Look, Custer," Kilkenny said, "there are seventy-nine things I don't want from you. One of them is advice."

"Too bad, Kilkenny. I've made tests with this blue dye —"

"This will surprise and shock you," Kilkenny broke in. "But the New York Police Department has laboratories and chemists of its own. Maybe you never heard of Dr. Gettler."

"Okay," I said. "But what about Newsom's bandaged hands?"

"You're three laps behind," the little guy said. "I had a crew at the Midtown Plaza while Newsom was still jittering over Aladdin's corpse. The hotel physician confirms Newsom's story. A trunk did drop on his fingers."

"I got other ideas, Kilkenny."

"I was afraid of that," Kilkenny said. "That's why I'm going to put you out of commission by taking the

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little lady here down to my place of business in West Twentieth Street. No story-book sleuth can function without a dizzy blonde assistant. Fold, Custer."

"When can I talk to you seriously, Kilkenny?" I asked.

"After the autopsy tomorrow. Bellevue. 10 A.M. Now go out and break a case or a leg or something."

"Good night, Kilkenny," I said sweetly. "See you at the morgue."

Good night to you, too, Carp. And do get plenty of sleep and eat good wholesome food.

Yours in crime,
MARSHALL T. CUSTER

MAN WITH BLUE EARS STABBED, POLICE SAY

by Marshall T. Custer
Special FWNA Correspondent

NEW YORK — The murder of The Man With the Blue Ears, George Aladdin, will be solved within 24 hours. Although New York police insist the case is still a mystery, your correspondent has information that will put the finger on the killer tonight. After that, it will be up to Homicide detectives to make the arrest.

Here are the latest official developments:

1. Autopsy findings refute the story that Aladdin's death was the result of a press-agent hoax, in which Aladdin was to have been found in a coma induced by sleeping pills. The Medical Examiner reports that Aladdin's body contained no trace of any kind of hypnotics whatsoever.

2. The Medical Examiner does say, however, that Aladdin was probably unconscious when murdered, as the autopsy showed skull-fracture and concussion.

George Aladdin was evidently hit on the head, then stabbed with a thin, sharp knife which caused no external bleeding. A small, sharp paring knife which had been replaced in a kitchen drawer gave a positive reaction to Van Deen tests for bloodstains.

3. Irving Jeffries, press agent for the film *The Man With the Blue Ears*, and his fiancée, Annabel Anders, who were taken into custody at LaGuardia Field just as they were about to flee from New York, are being held without bail. Frank Newsom, Jeffries' employer, offered to furnish bond, but Judge Twoberry of Surrogate Court took the matter of bail under advisement. Jeffries denied he was fleeing; he insisted he was taking a trip to his fiancée's home and did not know that Aladdin had been murdered.

Betty Morningstar, film actress, also held as a material witness, was released on $5000 bond.

4. The dead man had a prison record. Search of the F.B.I. fingerprint files in Washington revealed that Aladdin served a year in San Quentin Penitentiary following a 1939 trip from Hollywood to Las Vegas, Nevada, with a female trapeze artist. The aerialist's husband charged Aladdin with violation of the Mann Act, and a Federal jury found him guilty as charged.

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New York, June 5

Benjamin Carp, Mng. Ed.,
Far West Newspaper Alliance,
San Francisco, Calif.

Dear Carp:

Thanks for the telegraphic money order which I have turned over to the dentist who is shoring up my remodeled front teeth. You still owe me for a new typewriter, though.

I'm glad my wind-up of The Man With the Blue Ears caught the finals and scooped the world. Here's the play-by-play:

I'd just filed the last take when I got a phone call from Betty Morningstar. She was terrified, she said. She'd just heard on the radio that Irving and Annabel had been released.

"Irving is furious at me for leading you to his apartment," she said. "He'll kill me. What'll I do?"

"I'll be right over," I said. I tried to phone Kilkenny at Homicide. No soap. I tried the Midtown Plaza, where I thought he might be. He wasn't. I grabbed my hat, opened the door, and looked right into the muzzle of a .45 automatic which the murderer was holding.

"Back up," the killer said.

I backed swiftly. Straight as an arrow I backed into my typewriter. The murderer kicked the door shut and moved the artillery closer to my vitals, saying, "You're too damned smart. Raise your hands."

Before raising, my right hand closed on the carriage of my portable. I swung it, straight for the face. I ducked and fell flat just as the gun went off.

When the loose plaster stopped raining down on the back of my neck, I raised my head to look. The typewriter was a noble ruin but the killer was out cold. I dragged the limp bundle of homicidal protoplasm into the bathroom by one ankle, and locked the door.

I picked up the gun the murderer had dropped, broke it, and emptied the cartridges from the cylinder. Just then Detective Kilkenny stormed into the room, followed by a chorus of angry and excited voices.

"Have you got a permit for that gun?"

"Well, not exactly," I said, "so I suppose you will jug me for violation of the Baumes Law. But if you would first back that howling mob into the hall, I would like to speak to you privately."

Kilkenny closed the door. He said, "I turned Jeffries loose."

"So I understand. And while I have a personal grudge against Irving Jeffries, I'm glad you did. He didn't kill Aladdin. Aladdin had been dead for an hour or so before Irving did the paint job and stood him up in the closet. You see, when Irving came up looking for Annabel and found Aladdin dead, he was afraid Annabel had resorted to murder to protect her virtue. So he did the blue-ears routine to cover up for Annabel. He'd *just* finished when I arrived with Betty — because he smeared blue on me when

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we shook hands and the blue dries in five minutes. Moreover, Betty is innocent by the same reasoning. If she'd been taking me to view the remains, the ears would have been blue before she came to get me, not freshly painted when we arrived."

"There's another complaint against you, Custer," Kilkenny said. "Harboring a murderer."

"Oh, that," I said. "You mean the clunk I got locked in the bathroom?"

"Open up," Kilkenny said. He had his .32 police positive in one hand and a pair of handcuffs in the other. Frank Newsom was still cold on the floor. Kilkenny used the bracelets.

"How do you know this is my man?" Kilkenny said.

"Simple," I said. "Newsom arrives in New York to confer with people he says he never saw before. By sundown one of them is murdered — the one with a prison record. Suppose this man *had* known Newsom under incriminating circumstances? When Newsom recognized him — and vice versa — wouldn't he kill the man to avoid being blackmailed for life? And wouldn't he try to conceal his own past by fixing his hands so he couldn't be printed immediately? I predict, Kilkenny, that when Newsom's fingers heal enough so you can print him, you'll find he served time in the same pen as Aladdin."

"We won't have to wait," Kilkenny said. "Before he smashed his fingers, Newsom left enough fragmentary prints around his hotel room so that we could give him a Bertillon classification. He was convicted on thirteen counts of using the mails to defraud and sentenced to ten years in the same pen as Aladdin. He escaped from the prison hospital in 1940. If Aladdin had put the finger on him, he'd have gone back for another five years."

"Kilkenny, you grieve me," I said. "You knew all this and still let a dangerous criminal roam the streets freely for days?"

"I had to find the proper witness."

"Like who?" I asked.

"Like the clerk at Aladdin's hotel," Kilkenny said. "Newsom told us Aladdin wasn't in when he first called. Well, the clerk says he *told* Newsom that Aladdin wasn't in, on Aladdin's instructions. When Newsom went up in the elevator anyway, the clerk called Aladdin to tell him so. So we know Aladdin *was* in when Newsom first called."

"And why has all this been kept top secret until just now?" I asked.

"Because the clerk left on vacation that afternoon," Kilkenny said. "We couldn't locate him in Atlantic City until today. He'd neglected to tell his wife where he was going."

So you see, Carp? Police methods are indeed dull and prosaic.

I'm flying west as soon as I get my new teeth.

Are you keeping your teeth good and sharp these days, Carp? There are a lot of tempting backs around to bite.

Yours in crime,
MARSHALL T. CUSTER

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Catalogue of the Eighteen Errors Deliberately Inserted in

THE MAN WITH THE BLUE EARS

by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

for the amusement, delectation, and/or puzzlement of eagle-eyed readers

1. ". . . *the bundle of handsomely engraved portraits of Washington and Lincoln.*"
Since Betty handed over $10 and $20 bills, the portraits would be of Alexander Hamilton and Andrew Jackson. Washington and Lincoln appear on $1 and $5 bills.

2. ". . . *drooping jowls like a bull terrier.*"
The bulldog has drooping jowls, but the bull terrier has a trim, streamlined snout.

3. ". . . *Pisco punch . . . made with Brazilian brandy.*"
Pisco punch is made with *Peruvian* brandy, named for the little port of Pisco, some hundred miles south of Callao, Peru.

4. ". . . *red as lapis lazuli.*"
Custer must be color-blind. Lapis lazuli is, of course, blue.

5. ". . . *rigor never sets in until two hours after death.*"
Rigor mortis usually begins about two hours after death, but there are occasional cases of instantaneous rigor, sometimes called cadaveric spasm, associated with fatal injury to either the head or spine.

6. ". . . *four dozen police dicks with New York's homicide bureau. . . .*"
There are no police detectives with the New York homicide bureau, which is part of the District Attorney's office. The police division is the homicide *squad.*

7. "*Allergic shock. Anaptyxis.*"
Anaptyxis is a term describing the phonetics of certain vowel sounds. The term for allergic shock is *anaphylaxis.*

8. ". . . *two front molars that rattle.*"
Molars are back teeth. The front teeth are incisors.

9. ". . . *grab hold of a leg for a hammer lock.*"
The hammer lock is a wrestling hold in which one *arm* is twisted behind an adversary. Custer was probably thinking of Gotch's toe hold.

10. ". . . *Prussian blue, which contains arsenic.*"
Prussian blue contains cyanide. *Mineral* blue contains arsenic.

11. ". . . *the New York Police De-*

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partment has laboratories and chemists of its own. Maybe you never heard of Dr. Gettler."

Dr. Alexander Gettler, inventor of the Gettler test for drowning and many other aids to criminology, is chemist and toxicologist for the New York Medical Examiner's Office, which is independent of the police laboratories.

12. ". . . *a positive red reaction to Van Deen tests for bloodstains.*"

In the Van Deen test, in which the suspected substance is added to a solution of guaiac resin in alcohol, the solution turns *blue* when the reaction is positive. No doubt about it, Custer is color-blind.

13. ". . . *Judge Twoberry of Surrogate Court took the matter of bail under advisement.*"

The Surrogate Court in New York deals exclusively with the probate of wills and the settlement of estates. The matter of bail would come before a General Sessions judge.

14. ". . . *Aladdin served a year in San Quentin . . .*"

A Mann Act conviction would bring a sentence in a federal penitentiary. San Quentin is a California State prison.

15. "*I picked up the gun the murderer had dropped, broke it, and emptied the cartridges from the cylinder.*"

A few paragraphs earlier the murderer's gun was described as an automatic which of course has no cylinder.

16. ". . . *violation of the Baumes law.*"

The Baumes law in New York prescribes a life sentence for fourth offenders. Custer was thinking of the Sullivan law which requires the registration of firearms.

17. ". . . *his .32 police positive.*"

The police positive is a .38 caliber revolver.

18. ". . . *give him a Bertillon classification.*"

The Bertillon system of identification is based on anthropometric measurements and does not include fingerprints. The modern system of fingerprint classification bears the name of the man who devised it, Sir Edward R. Henry, a director of England's famous Scotland Yard.

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PRIZE-WINNING STORY

Another original for our **Black Mask** *department*

Here is a story that John D. MacDonald (remember his earlier prize-winner, the wonderful tale of "The Homesick Buick"?) really wanted to write. He knew that at best it had a limited market — he told us that if EQMM did not happen to like it, he would not even know where else to send it. (This is a fine compliment to EQMM'S constant search for the unusual, but it is also an underestimation of the story's appeal.) In any event, Mr. MacDonald felt he simply had to write this story — and any time an author feels that way, we want to see that story! The tales that lie dormant in writers' minds for years and years, that never die or even fade away, that keep nagging for recognition and birth — those are the stories that so often have power, impact, and an unforgettable quality.

When Mr. MacDonald submitted "I Always Get the Cuties" to last year's contest, he wrote: "I suspect that it is probably as unpleasant a little yarn as you will receive for this particular sweepstakes." No, we have had much more unpleasant entries. True, we don't buy stories that carry unpleasantness too far — there are limits to what can reasonably be called entertainment and escape; and there is never any excuse for sensationalism, sex, and sadism merely for their own sake. As we have so often said, the only taboo is that of bad taste. But while Mr. MacDonald's story concerns a particularly gruesome murder plan — and the author reminds us that "murder is something that should not be prettified" — it is interestingly written, original in its conception, and from a technical standpoint, most artfully done. And perhaps we should warn you: it packs a wallop . . .

I ALWAYS GET THE CUTIES

by JOHN D. MACDONALD

KEEGAN CAME INTO MY APARTment, frosted with winter, topcoat open, hat jammed on the back of his hard skull, bringing a noisy smell of the dark city night. He stood in front of my birch fire, his great legs planted, clapping and rubbing hard palms in the heat.

He grinned at me and winked one narrow gray eye. "I'm off duty, Doc.

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I wrapped up a package. A pretty package."

"Will bourbon do, Keegan?"

"If you haven't got any of that brandy left. This is a brandy night."

When I came back with the bottle and the glasses, he had stripped off his topcoat and tossed it on the couch. The crumpled hat was on the floor, near the discarded coat. Keegan had yanked a chair closer to the fire. He sprawled on the end of his spine, thick ankles crossed, the soles of his shoes steaming.

I poured his brandy and mine, and moved my chair and the long coffee table so we could share either end of it. It was bursting in him. I knew that. I've only had the vaguest hints about his home life. A house crowded with teen-age daughters, cluttered with their swains. Obviously no place to talk of his dark victories. And Keegan is not the sort of man to regale his co-workers with talk of his prowess. So I am, among other things, his sounding board. He bounces successes off the politeness of my listening, growing big in the echo of them.

"Ever try to haggle with a car dealer, Doc?" he asked.

"In a mild way."

"You are a mild guy. I tried once. Know what he told me? He said, 'Lieutenant, you try to make a car deal maybe once every two years. Me, I make ten a day. So what chance have you got?'"

This was a more oblique approach than Keegan generally used. I became attentive.

"It's the same with the cuties, Doc — the amateurs who think they can bring off one nice clean safe murder. Give me a cutie every time. I eat 'em alive. The pros are trouble. The cuties leave holes you can drive deisels through. This one was that woman back in October. At that cabin at Bear Paw Lake. What do you remember about it, Doc?"

I am always forced to summarize. It has got me into the habit of reading the crime news. I never used to.

"As I remember, Keegan, they thought she had been killed by a prowler. Her husband returned from a business trip and found the body. She had been dead approximately two weeks. Because it was the off season, the neighboring camps weren't occupied, and the people in the village thought she had gone back to the city. She had been strangled, I believe."

"Okay. So I'll fill you in on it. Then you'll see the problem I had. The name is Grosswalk. Cynthia and Harold. He met her ten years ago when he was in med. school. He was twenty-four and she was thirty. She was loaded. He married her and he never went back to med. school. He didn't do anything for maybe five, six years. Then he gets a job selling medical supplies, surgical instruments, that kind of stuff. Whenever a wife is dead, Doc, the first thing I do is check on how they were getting along. I guess you know that."

"Your standard procedure," I said.

"Sure. So I check. They got a nice

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house here in the city. Not many friends. But they got neighbors with ears. There are lots of brawls. I get the idea it is about money. The money is hers — was hers, I should say. I put it up to this Grosswalk. He says okay, so they weren't getting along so good, so what? I'm supposed to be finding out who killed her, sort of coordinating with the State Police, not digging into his home life. I tell him he is a nice suspect. He already knows that. He says he didn't kill her. Then he adds one thing too many. He says he couldn't have killed her. That's all he will say. Playing it cute. You understand. I eat those cuties alive."

He waved his empty glass. I went over and refilled it.

"You see what he's doing to me, Doc. He's leaving it up to me to prove how it was he couldn't have killed her. A reverse twist. That isn't too tough. I get in touch with the sales manager of the company. Like I thought, the salesmen have to make reports. He was making a western swing. It would be no big trick to fly back and sneak into the camp and kill her, take some money and junk to make it look good, and then fly back out there and pick up where he left off. She was killed on maybe the tenth of October, the medical examiner says. Then he finds her on the twenty-fourth. But the sales manager tells me something that needs a lot of checking. He says that this Grosswalk took sick out west on the eighth and went into a hospital, and he was in that hospital from the eighth to the fifteenth, a full seven days. He gave me the name of the hospital. Now you see how the cutie made his mistake. He could have told me that easy enough. No, he has to be cute. I figure that if he's innocent he would have told me. But he's so proud of whatever gimmick he rigged for me that he's got to let me find out the hard way."

"I suppose you went out there," I said.

"It took a lot of talk. They don't like spending money for things like that. They kept telling me I should ask the L. A. cops to check because that's a good force out there. Finally I have to go by bus, or pay the difference. So I go by bus. I found the doctor. Plural — doctors. It is a clinic deal, sort of, that this Grosswalk went to. He gives them his symptoms. They say it looks to them like the edge of a nervous breakdown just beginning to show. With maybe some organic complications. So they run him through the course. Seven days of tests and checks and observations. They tell me he was there, that he didn't leave, that he *couldn't* have left. But naturally I check the hospital. They reserve part of one floor for patients from the clinic. I talked to the head nurse on that floor, and to the nurse that had the most to do with Grosswalk. She showed me the schedule and charts. Every day, every night, they were fooling around with the guy, giving him injections of this and that. He couldn't have got out.

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The people at the clinic told me the results. He was okay. The rest had helped him a lot. They told him to slow down. They gave him a prescription for a mild sedative. Nothing organically wrong, even though the symptoms seemed to point that way."

"So the trip was wasted?"

"Not entirely. Because on a hunch I ask if he had visitors. They keep a register. A girl came to see him as often as the rules permitted. They said she was pretty. Her name was Mary MacCarney. The address is there. So I go and see her. She lives with her folks. A real tasty kid. Nineteen. Her folks think this Grosswalk is too old for her. She is tall Irish, all black and white and blue. It was warm and we sat on the porch. I soon find out this Grosswalk has been feeding her a line, telling her that his wife is an incurable invalid not long for this world, that he can't stand hurting her by asking for a divorce, that it is better to wait, and anyway, she says, her parents might approve of a widower, but never a guy who has been divorced. She has heard from Grosswalk that his wife has been murdered by a prowler and he will be out to see her as soon as he can. He has known her for a year. But of course I have told him not to leave town. I tell her not to get her hopes too high because it begins to look to me like this Grosswalk has knocked off his wife. Things get pretty hysterical, and her old lady gets in on it, and even driving away in the cab I can hear her old lady yelling at her.

"The first thing I do on getting back is check with the doctor who took care of Mrs. Grosswalk, and he says, as I thought he would, that she was as healthy as a horse. So I go back up to that camp and unlock it again. It is a snug place, Doc. Built so you could spend the winter there if you wanted to. Insulated and sealed, with a big fuel-oil furnace, and modern kitchen equipment, and so on. It was aired out a lot better than the first time I was in it. Grosswalk stated that he hadn't touched a thing. He said it was unlocked. He saw her and backed right out and went to report it. And the only thing touched had been the body.

"I poked around. This time I took my time. She was a tidy woman. There are twin beds. One is turned down. There is a very fancy nightgown laid out. That is a thing which bothered me. I looked at her other stuff. She has pajamas which are the right thing for October at the lake. They are made from that flannel stuff. There is only one other fancy nightgown, way in the back of a drawer. I have found out here in the city that she is not the type to fool around. So how come a woman who is alone wants to sleep so pretty? Because the husband is coming back from a trip. But he couldn't have come back from the trip. I find another thing. I find deep ruts off in the brush beside the camp. The first time I went there, her car was parked in back. Now it is gone. If the car was run off where those ruts were, anybody coming to

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the door wouldn't see it. If the door was locked they wouldn't even knock maybe, knowing she wouldn't be home. That puzzles me. She might do it if she didn't want company. I prowl some more. I look in the deep freeze. It is well stocked. No need to buy stuff for a hell of a while. The refrigerator is the same way. And the electric is still on."

He leaned back and looked at me expectantly.

"Is that all you had to go on?" I asked.

"A murder happens here and the murderer is in Los Angeles at the time. I got him because he tried to be a cutie. Want to take a try, Doc?"

I knew I had to make an attempt. "Some sort of device?"

"To strangle a woman? Mechanical hands? You're getting too fancy, Doc."

"Then he hired somebody to do it?"

"There are guys you can hire, but they like guns. Or a piece of pipe in an alley. I don't know where you'd go to hire a strangler. He did it himself, Doc."

"Frankly, Keegan, I don't see how he could have."

"Well, I'll tell you how I went after it. I went to the medical examiner and we had a little talk. Cop logic, Doc. If the geography is wrong, then maybe you got the wrong idea on timing. But the medico checks it out. He says definitely the woman has been dead twelve days to two weeks when he makes the examination. I ask him how he knows. He says because of the extent of decomposition of the body. I ask him if that is a constant. He says no — you use a formula. A sort of rule-of-thumb formula. I ask him the factors. He says cause of death, temperature, humidity, physical characteristics of the body, how it was clothed, whether or not insects could have got to it, and so on.

"By then I had it, Doc. It was cute. I went back to the camp and looked around. It took me some time to find them. You never find a camp without them. Candles. They were in a drawer in the kitchen. Funny looking candles, Doc. Melted down, sort of. A flat side against the bottom of the drawer, and all hardened again. Then I had another idea. I checked the stove burners. I found some pieces of burned flaked metal down under the heating elements.

"Then it was easy. I had this Grosswalk brought in again. I let him sit in a cell for four hours and get nervous before I took the rookie cop in. I'd coached that rookie for an hour, so he did it right. I had him dressed in a leather jacket and work pants. I make him repeat his story in front of Grosswalk. 'I bought a chain saw last year,' he says, acting sort of confused, 'and I was going around to the camps where there are any people and I was trying to get some work cutting up fireplace wood. So I called on Mrs. Grosswalk. She didn't want any wood, but she was nice about it.' I ask the rookie when that was. He scratches

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his head and says, 'Sometime around the seventeenth I think it was.' That's where I had to be careful. I couldn't let him be positive about the date. I say she was supposed to be dead a week by then and was he sure it was her. 'She wasn't dead then. I know her. I'd seen her in the village. A kind of heavy-set woman with blonde hair. It was her all right, Lieutenant.' I asked him was he sure of the date and he said yes, around the seventeenth like he said, but he could check his records and find the exact day.

"I told him to take off. I just watched that cutie and saw him come apart. Then he gave it to me. He killed her on the sixteenth, the day he got out of the hospital. He flew into Omaha. By then I've got the stenographer taking it down. Grosswalk talks, staring at the floor, like he was talking to himself. It was going to be a dry run. He wasn't going to do it if she'd been here in the city or into the village in the previous seven days. But once she got in the camp she seldom went out, and the odds were all against any callers. On his previous trip to Omaha he had bought a jalopy that would run. It would make the fifty miles to the lake all right. He took the car off the lot where he'd left it and drove to the lake. She was surprised to see him back ahead of schedule. He explained the company car was being fixed. He questioned her. Finally she said she hadn't seen or talked to a living soul in ten days. Then he knew he was set to take the risk.

"He grabbed her neck and hung on until she was dead. He had his shoulders hunched right up around his ears when he said that. It was evening when he killed her, nearly bedtime. First he closed every window. Then he turned on the furnace as high as it would go. There was plenty of oil in the tank. He left the oven door open and the oven turned as high as it would go. He even built a fire in the fireplace, knowing it would be burned out by morning and there wouldn't be any smoke. He filled the biggest pans of water he could find and left them on the top of the stove. He took money and some of her jewelry, turned out the lights and locked the doors. He ran her car off in the brush where nobody would be likely to see it. He said by the time he left the house it was like an oven in there.

"He drove the jalopy back to Omaha, parked it back in the lot, and caught an 11:15 flight to Los Angeles. The next morning he was making calls. And keeping his fingers crossed. He worked his way east. He got to the camp on the twenty-fourth — about 10 in the morning. He said he went in and turned things off and opened up every window, and then went out and was sick. He waited nearly an hour before going back in. It was nearly down to normal temperature. He checked the house. He noticed she had turned down both beds before he killed her. He remade his. The water had boiled out of the pans and the bottoms had burned

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through. He scaled the pans out into the lake. He said he tried not to look at her, but he couldn't help it. He had enough medical background to know that it had worked, and also to fake his own illness in L. A. He went out and was sick again, and then he got her car back where it belonged. He closed most of the windows. He made another inspection trip and then drove into the village. He's a cutie, Doc, and I ate him alive."

There was a long silence. I knew what was expected of me. But I had my usual curious reluctance to please him. He held the glass cradled in his hand, gazing with a half smile into the dying fire. His face looked like stone.

"That was very intelligent, Keegan," I said.

"The pros give you real trouble, Doc. The cuties always leave holes. I couldn't bust geography, so I had to bust time." He yawned massively and stood up. "Read all about it in the morning paper, Doc."

"I'll certainly do that."

I held his coat for him. He's a big man. I had to reach up to get it properly onto his shoulders. He mashed the hat onto his head as I walked to the door with him. He put his big hand on the knob, turned, and smiled down at me without mirth.

"I always get the cuties, Doc. Always."

"You certainly seem to," I said.

"They are my favorite meat."

"So I understand."

He balled one big fist and bumped it lightly against my chin, still grinning at me. "And I'm going to get you too, Doc. You know that. You were cute. You're just taking longer than most. But you know how it's going to come out, don't you?"

I don't answer that any more. There's nothing to say. There hasn't been anything to say for a long time now.

He left, walking hard into the wild night. I sat and looked into my fire. I could hear the wind. I reached for the bottle. The wind raged over the city, as monstrous and inevitable as Keegan. It seemed as though it was looking for food — the way Keegan is always doing.

But I no longer permit myself the luxury of imagination.

OBSERVE UNITED NATIONS DAY
OCTOBER 24th

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Every once in a while a book of short stories appears which promptly becomes the vortex of critical excitement. Such a book is SOMEONE LIKE YOU, *published last year by Alfred A. Knopf — a volume of eighteen tales which, to put it mildly, got "rave" reviews. In the widespread acclaim, Mr. Dahl was compared — a popular critical method, by the way — to many other authors, and some of the comparisons must have burst upon Mr. Dahl with a soupçon of surprise, if not astonishment. His work, the critics more or less agreed, resembled that of Saki, John Collier, Ring Lardner, and O. Henry — that is to say, the best of Roald Dahl could be expected to combine the horror and whimsicality of Saki, the bizarre and macabre fantasy of John Collier, the satirical bite and wild humor of Ring Lardner, and the surprise endings of O. Henry. A large literary order, you would say — yet the critics went even further. They also brought up images of Poe (but which writer does not owe at least a small debt to Poe?); they remembered the cruel wit and cynical terror of Ambrose Bierce; they rediscovered "the undercurrent of serious commentary one might expect to find" in Angus Wilson; and they did not neglect the sophisticated qualities of A. E. Coppard, himself "a cross between Saki and Lord Dunsany."*

Roald Dahl has much to live up to in the future — perhaps too much for any one person in this specialized world . . .

Here is the first of a series of tales by Mr. Dahl — one of his humdingers. The sheer artistry which so impressed the critics is readily apparent — and something more. You will find that with the most unlikely of story materials Mr. Dahl manages to generate a truly remarkable suspense.

TASTE

by ROALD DAHL

THERE WERE SIX OF US TO DINNER that night at Mike Schofield's house in London: Mike and his wife and daughter, my wife and I, and a man called Richard Pratt.

Richard Pratt was a famous gourmet. He was president of a small society known as The Epicures, and each month he circulated privately to its members a pamphlet on food and wines. He organized dinners where sumptuous dishes and rare

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wines were served. He refused to smoke for fear of harming his palate, and when discussing a wine, he had a curious, rather droll habit of referring to it as though it were a living being. "A prudent wine," he would say, "rather diffident and evasive, but quite prudent." Or, "a good-humored wine, benevolent and cheerful — slightly obscene, perhaps, but nonetheless good-humored."

I had been to dinner at Mike's twice before when Richard Pratt was there, and on each occasion Mike and his wife had gone out of their way to produce a special meal for the famous gourmet. And this one, clearly, was to be no exception. The moment we entered the dining room, I could see that the table was laid for a feast. The tall candles, the yellow roses, the quantity of shining silver, the three wine glasses to each person, and, above all, the faint scent of roasting meat from the kitchen brought the first warm oozings of saliva to my mouth.

As we sat down, I remembered that on both Richard Pratt's previous visits Mike had played a little betting game with him over the claret, challenging him to name its breed and its vintage. Pratt had replied that that should not be too difficult, provided it was one of the great years. Mike had then bet him a case of the wine in question that he could not do it. Pratt had accepted, and had won both times. Tonight I felt sure that the little game would be played over again, for Mike was quite willing to lose the bet in order to prove that his wine was good enough to be recognized, and Pratt, for his part, seemed to take a grave, restrained pleasure in displaying his knowledge.

The meal began with a plate of whitebait, fried very crisp in butter, and to go with it there was a Moselle. Mike got up and poured the wine himself, and when he sat down again I could see that he was watching Richard Pratt. He had set the bottle down in front of me so that I could read the label. It said, *Geierslay Ohligsberg, 1945*. He leaned over and whispered to me that Geierslay was a tiny village in the Moselle, almost unknown outside Germany. He said that this wine we were drinking was something unusual, that the output of the vineyard was so small that it was almost impossible for a stranger to get any of it. He had visited Geierslay personally the previous summer in order to obtain the few dozen bottles that they had finally allowed him to have.

"I doubt anyone else in the country has any of it at the moment," he said. I saw him glance again at Richard Pratt. "Great thing about Moselle," he continued, raising his voice, "it's the perfect wine to serve before a claret. A lot of people serve a Rhine wine instead, but that's because they don't know any better. A Rhine wine will kill a delicate claret, you know that? It's barbaric to serve a Rhine before a claret. But a Moselle — ah! — a Moselle is exactly right."

Mike Schofield was an amiable, middle-aged man. But he was a stock-

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broker. To be precise, he was a jobber in the stock market, and, like a number of his kind, he seemed to be somewhat embarrassed, almost ashamed, to find that he had made so much money with so slight a talent. In his heart he knew that he was not really much more than a bookmaker — an unctuous, infinitely respectable, secretly unscrupulous bookmaker — and he knew that his friends knew it, too. So he was seeking now to become a man of culture, to cultivate a literary and esthetic taste, to collect paintings, music, books, and all the rest of it. His little sermon about Rhine wine and Moselle was a part of this thing, this culture that he sought.

"A charming little wine, don't you think?" he said. He was still watching Richard Pratt. I could see him give a rapid, furtive glance down the table each time he dropped his head to take a mouthful of whitebait. I could almost *feel* him waiting for the moment when Pratt would take his first sip, and look up from his glass with a smile of pleasure, of astonishment, perhaps even of wonder, and then there would be a discussion and Mike would tell him about the village of Geierslay.

But Richard Pratt did not taste his wine. He was completely engrossed in conversation with Mike's eighteen-year-old daughter, Louise. He was half turned toward her, smiling at her, telling her, so far as I could gather, some story about a chef in a Paris restaurant. As he spoke, he leaned closer and closer to her, seeming in his eagerness almost to impinge upon her, and the poor girl leaned as far as she could away from him, nodding politely, rather desperately, and looking not at his face but at the topmost button of his dinner jacket.

We finished our fish, and the maid came around removing the plates. When she came to Pratt, she saw that he had not yet touched his food, so she hesitated, and Pratt noticed her. He waved her away, broke off his conversation, and quickly began to eat, popping the little crisp brown fish quickly into his mouth with rapid jabbing movements of his fork. Then, when he had finished, he reached for his glass, and in two short swallows he tipped the wine down his throat, and turned immediately to resume his conversation with Louise Schofield.

Mike saw it all. I was conscious of him sitting there, very still, containing himself, looking at his guest. His round, jovial face seemed to loosen slightly and to sag, but he was still and said nothing.

Soon the maid came forward with the second course. This was a large roast of beef. She placed it on the table in front of Mike, who stood up and carved it, cutting the slices very thin, laying them gently on the plates for the maid to take around. When he had served everyone, including himself, he put down the carving knife and leaned forward with both hands on the edge of the table.

"Now," he said, speaking to all of us but looking at Richard Pratt.

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"Now for the claret. I must go and fetch the claret, if you'll excuse me."

"You go and fetch it, Mike?" I said. "Where is it?"

"In my study, with the cork out — breathing."

"Why the study?"

"Acquiring room temperature, of course. It's been there twenty-four hours."

"But why the study?"

"It's the best place in the house. Richard helped me choose it last time he was here."

At the sound of his name, Pratt looked around.

"That's right, isn't it?" Mike said.

"Yes," Pratt answered, nodding gravely. "That's right."

"On top of the green filing cabinet in my study," Mike said. "That's the place we chose. A good draft-free spot in a room with an even temperature. Excuse me, now, will you, while I fetch it."

The thought of another wine to play with had restored his humor, and he hurried out the door, to return a minute later, more slowly, walking softly, holding in both hands a wine basket in which a dark bottle lay. The label was out of sight, facing downward. "Now!" he cried as he came toward the table. "What about this one, Richard? You'll never name this one!"

Richard Pratt turned slowly and looked up at Mike; then his eyes traveled down to the bottle, nestling in its small wicker basket, and he raised his eyebrows, a slight, supercilious arching movement of the brows, and with it a pushing outward of the wet lower lip, suddenly imperious and ugly.

"You'll never get it," Mike said. "Not in a hundred years."

"A claret?" Richard Pratt asked, condescending.

"Of course."

"I assume, then, that it's from one of the smaller vineyards?"

"Maybe it is, Richard. And then again, maybe it isn't."

"But it's a good year? One of the great years?"

"Yes, I guarantee that."

"Then it shouldn't be too difficult," Richard Pratt said, drawling his words, looking exceedingly bored. Except that, to me, there was something strange about his drawling and his boredom: between the eyes a shadow of something evil, and in his bearing an intentness that gave me a faint sense of uneasiness as I watched him.

"This one is really rather difficult," Mike said. "I won't force you to bet on this one."

"Indeed. And why not?" Again the slow arching of the brows, the cool, intent look.

"Because it's difficult."

"That's not very complimentary to me, you know."

"My dear man," Mike said, "I'll bet you with pleasure, if that's what you wish."

"It shouldn't be too hard to name."

"You mean you want to bet?"

"I'm perfectly willing to bet," Richard Pratt said.

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"All right, then, we'll have the usual. A case of the wine itself."

"You don't think I'll be able to name it, do you?"

"As a matter of fact, and with all due respect, I don't," Mike said. He was making some effort to remain polite, but Pratt was not bothering overmuch to conceal his contempt for the whole proceeding. And yet, curiously, his next question seemed to betray a certain interest.

"You like to increase the bet?"

"No, Richard. A case is plenty."

"Would you like to bet fifty cases?"

"That would be silly."

Mike stood very still behind his chair at the head of the table, and he was still carefully holding the bottle in its ridiculous wicker basket. There was a trace of whiteness around his nostrils now, and his mouth was shut very tight.

Pratt was lolling back in his chair, looking up at him, the eyebrows raised, the eyes half closed, a little smile touching the corners of his lips. And again I saw, or thought I saw, something distinctly disturbing about the man's face, that shadow of intentness between the eyes, and in the eyes themselves, right in their centers, where it was black, a small, slow spark of shrewdness, hiding. "So you don't want to increase the bet?"

"As far as I'm concerned, old man, I don't give a damn," Mike said. "I'll bet you anything you like."

The three women and I sat quietly, watching the two men. Mike's wife was becoming annoyed; her mouth had gone sour and I felt that at any moment she was going to interrupt. Our roast beef lay before us on our plates, slowly steaming.

"So you'll bet me anything I like?"

"That's what I told you. I'll bet you anything you damn well please, if you want to make an issue out of it."

"Even ten thousand pounds?"

"Certainly I will, if that's the way you want it." Mike was more confident now. He knew quite well that he could call any sum Pratt cared to mention.

"So you say I can name the bet?" Pratt asked again.

"That's what I said."

There was a pause while Pratt looked slowly around the table, first at me, then at the three women, each in turn. He appeared to be reminding us that we were witness to the offer.

"Mike!" Mrs. Schofield said. "Mike, why don't we stop this nonsense and eat our food. It's getting cold."

"But it isn't nonsense," Pratt told her evenly. "We're making a little bet."

I noticed the maid standing in the background holding a dish of vegetables, wondering whether to come forward or not.

"All right, then," Pratt said. "I'll tell you what I want you to bet."

"Come on, then," Mike said, rather reckless. "I don't give a damn what it is — you're on."

Pratt nodded, and again the little smile moved the corners of his lips, and then, quite slowly, looking at

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Mike all the time, he said, "I want you to bet me the hand of your daughter in marriage."

Louise Schofield gave a jump. "Hey!" she cried. "No! That's not funny! Look here, Daddy, that's not funny at all."

"No, dear," her mother said. "They're only joking."

"I'm not joking," Richard Pratt said.

"It's ridiculous," Mike said. He was off balance again now.

"You said you'd bet anything I liked."

"I meant money."

"You didn't *say* money."

"That's what I meant."

"Then it's a pity you didn't say it. But anyway, if you wish to go back on your offer, that's quite all right with me."

"It's not a question of going back on my offer, old man. It's a no-bet anyway, because you can't match the stake. You yourself don't happen to have a daughter to put up against mine in case you lose. And if you had, I wouldn't want to marry her."

"I'm glad of that, dear," his wife said.

"I'll put up anything you like," Pratt announced. "My house, for example. How about my house?"

"Which one?" Mike asked, joking now.

"The country one."

"Why not the other one as well?"

"All right, then, if you wish it. Both my houses."

At that point, I saw Mike pause. He took a step forward and placed the bottle in its basket gently down on the table. He moved the salt cellar to one side, then the pepper, and then he picked up his knife, studied the blade thoughtfully for a moment, and put it down again. His daughter, too, had seen him pause.

"Now, Daddy!" she cried. "Don't be *absurd!* It's too silly for words. I refuse to be betted on like this."

"Quite right, dear," her mother said. "Stop it at once, Mike, and sit down and eat your food."

Mike ignored her. He looked over at his daughter and he smiled, a slow, fatherly, protective smile. But in his eyes, suddenly, there glimmered a little triumph. "You know," he said, smiling as he spoke, "you know, Louise, we ought to think about this a bit."

"Now, stop it, Daddy! I refuse even to listen to you! Why, I've never heard anything so ridiculous in my life!"

"No, seriously, my dear. Just wait a moment and hear what I have to say."

"But I don't want to hear it."

"Louise! Please! It's like this. Richard, here, has offered us a serious bet. *He* is the one who wants to make it, not me. And if he loses, he will have to hand over a considerable amount of property. Now, wait a minute, my dear, don't interrupt. The point is this. He *cannot possibly win.*"

"He seems to think he can."

"Now, listen to me, because I know

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what I'm talking about. The expert, when tasting a claret — so long as it is not one of the famous, great wines like Lafite or Latour — can only get a certain way towards naming the vineyard. He can, of course, tell you the Bordeaux district from which the wine comes, whether it is from St. Emilion, Pomerol, Graves, or Médoc. But then each district has several communes, little counties, and each county has many, many small vineyards. It is impossible for a man to differentiate between them all by taste and smell alone. I don't mind telling you that this one I've got here is a wine from a small vineyard that is surrounded by many other small vineyards, and he'll never get it. It's impossible."

"You can't be sure of that," his daughter said.

"I'm telling you I can. Though I say it myself, I understand quite a bit about this wine business, you know. And anyway, heavens alive, girl, I'm your father and you don't think I'd let you in for — for — for something you didn't want, do you? I'm trying to make you some money."

"Mike!" his wife said sharply. "Stop it now, Mike, please!"

Again he ignored her. "If you will take this bet," he said to his daughter, "in ten minutes you will be the owner of two large houses."

"But I don't want two large houses, Daddy."

"Then sell them. Sell them back to him on the spot. I'll arrange all that for you. And then, just think of it, my dear, you'll be rich! You'll be independent for the rest of your life!"

"Oh, Daddy, I don't like it. I think it's silly."

"So do I," the mother said. She jerked her head briskly up and down as she spoke, like a hen. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Michael, ever suggesting such a thing! Your own daughter, too!"

Mike didn't even look at her. "Take it!" he said eagerly, staring hard at the girl. "Take it, quick! I'll guarantee you won't lose."

"But I don't like it, Daddy."

"Come on, girl. Take it!"

Mike was pushing her hard. He was leaning toward her, fixing her with two hard, bright eyes, and it was not easy for the daughter to resist him.

"But what if I lose?"

"I keep telling you, you can't lose. I'll guarantee it."

"Oh, Daddy, must I?"

"I'm making you a fortune. So come on now. What do you say, Louise? All right?"

For the last time, she hesitated. Then she gave a helpless little shrug of the shoulders and said, "Oh, all right, then. Just so long as you swear there's no danger of losing."

"Good!" Mike cried. "That's fine! Then it's a bet!"

"Yes," Richard Pratt said, looking at the girl. "It's a bet."

Immediately, Mike picked up the wine, tipped the first thimbleful into his own glass, then skipped excitedly

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around the table filling up all the others. Now everyone was watching Richard Pratt, watching his face as he reached slowly for his glass with his right hand and lifted it to his nose. The man was about 50 years old and he did not have a pleasant face. Somehow, it was all mouth — mouth and lips — the full, wet lips of the professional gourmet, the lower lip hanging downward in the center, a pendulous, permanently open taster's lip, shaped open to receive the rim of a glass or a morsel of food. Like a keyhole, I thought, watching it; his mouth is like a large, wet keyhole.

Slowly he lifted the glass to his nose. The point of the nose entered the glass and moved over the surface of the wine, delicately sniffing. He swirled the wine gently around in the glass to release the bouquet. His concentration was intense. He had closed his eyes, and now the whole top half of his body, the head and neck and chest, seemed to become a kind of huge, sensitive smelling-machine, receiving, filtering, analyzing the message from the sniffing nose.

Mike, I noticed, was lounging in his chair, apparently unconcerned, but he was watching every move. Mrs. Schofield, the wife, sat prim and upright at the other end of the table, looking straight ahead, her face tight with disapproval. The daughter, Louise, had shifted her chair away a little, and sidewise, facing the gourmet, and she, like her father, was watching closely.

For at least a minute the smelling process continued; then, without opening his eyes or moving his head, Pratt lowered the glass to his mouth and tipped in almost half the contents. He paused, his mouth full of wine, getting the first taste; then he permitted some of it to trickle down his throat, and I saw his Adam's apple move as it passed by. But most of it he retained in his mouth. And now, without swallowing again, he drew in through his lips a thin breath of air, which mingled with the fumes of the wine in the mouth and passed on down into his lungs. He held the breath, blew it out through his nose, and finally began to roll the wine around under the tongue, and chewed it, actually chewed it with his teeth, as though it were bread.

It was a solemn, impressive performance, and I must say he did it well.

"Um," he said, putting down the glass, running a pink tongue over his lips.

"Um — yes. A very interesting little wine — gentle and gracious, almost feminine in the aftertaste."

There was an excess of saliva in his mouth, and as he spoke he spat an occasional bright speck of it onto the table.

"Now we can start to eliminate," he said. "You will pardon me for doing this carefully, but there is much at stake. Normally I would perhaps take a bit of a chance, leaping forward quickly and landing right in the middle of the vineyard of my choice.

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But this time — I must move cautiously this time, must I not?" He looked up at Mike and he smiled, a thick-lipped, wet-lipped smile. Mike did not smile back.

"First, then, which district in Bordeaux does this wine come from? That is not difficult to guess. It is far too light in the body to be from either St. Emilion or Graves. It is obviously a Médoc. There's no doubt about *that*.

"Now — from which commune in Médoc does it come? That also, by elimination, should not be too difficult to decide. Margaux? No. It cannot be Margaux. It has not the violent bouquet of a Margaux. Pauillac? It cannot be Pauillac, either. It is too tender, too gentle and wistful for a Pauillac. The wine of Pauillac has a character that is almost imperious in its taste. And also, to me, a Pauillac contains just a little pith, a curious, dusty, pithy flavor that the grape acquires from the soil of the district. No, no. This — this is a very gentle wine, demure and bashful in the first taste, emerging shyly but quite graciously in the second. A little arch, perhaps, in the second taste, and a little naughty also, testing the tongue with a trace, just a trace, of tannin. Then, in the aftertaste, delightful — consoling and feminine, with a certain blithely generous quality that one associates only with the wines of the commune of St. Julien. Unmistakably this is a St. Julien."

He leaned back in his chair, held his hands up level with his chest, and placed the fingertips carefully together. He was becoming ridiculously pompous, but I thought that some of it was deliberate, simply to mock his host. I found myself waiting rather tensely for him to go on. The girl Louise was lighting a cigarette. Pratt heard the match strike and he turned on her, flaring suddenly with real anger. "Please!" he said. "Please don't do that! It's a disgusting habit, to smoke at table!"

She looked up at him, still holding the burning match in one hand, the big, slow eyes settling on his face, resting there a moment, moving away again, slow and contemptuous, and, bending her head, she blew out the match, but continued to hold the unlighted cigarette in her fingers.

"I'm sorry, my dear," Pratt said, "but I simply cannot have smoking at table."

She didn't look at him again.

"Now, let me see — where were we?" he said. "Ah, yes. This wine is from Bordeaux, in the district of Médoc, from the commune of St. Julien. So far, so good. But now we come to the more difficult part — the name of the vineyard itself. For in St. Julien there are many vineyards, and as our host so rightly remarked earlier on, there is often not much difference between the wine of one and the wine of another. But we shall see."

He paused again, closing his eyes. "I am trying to establish the 'growth,' " he said. "If I can do that, it will be half the battle. Now, let me see. This

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wine is obviously not from a first-growth vineyard — nor even a second. It is not a great wine. The quality, the — the — what do you call it? — the radiance, the power, is lacking. But a third growth — that it could be. And yet I doubt it. We know it is a good year — our host has said so — and this is probably flattering it a little bit. I must be careful. I must be very careful here."

He picked up his glass and took another small sip.

"Yes," he said, sucking his lips, "I was right. It is a fourth growth. Now I am sure of it. A fourth growth from a very good year — from a great year, in fact. And that's what made it taste for a moment like a third-or even a second-growth wine. Good! That's better! Now we are closing in! What are the fourth-growth vineyards in the commune of St. Julien?"

Again he paused, took up his glass, and held the rim against that sagging, pendulous lower lip of his. Then I saw the tongue shoot out, pink and narrow, the tip of it dipping into the wine, withdrawing swiftly again — a repulsive sight. When he lowered the glass, his eyes remained closed, the face concentrated, only the lips moving, sliding over each other like two pieces of wet, spongy rubber.

"There it is again!" he cried. "Tannin in the middle taste, and the quick astringent squeeze upon the tongue. Yes, yes, of course! Now I have it! This wine comes from one of those small vineyards around Beychevelle. I remember now. The Beychevelle district, and the river and the little harbor that has silted up so the wine ships can no longer use it. Beychevelle . . . Could it actually be a Beychevelle itself? No, I don't think so. Not quite. But it is somewhere very close. Château Talbot? Could it be Talbot? Yes, it could. Wait one moment."

He sipped the wine again, and out of the side of my eye I noticed Mike Schofield and how he was leaning farther and farther forward over the table, his mouth slightly open, his small eyes fixed upon Richard Pratt.

"No. I was wrong. It is not a Talbot. A Talbot comes forward to you just a little quicker than this one; the fruit is nearer to the surface. If it is a '34, which I believe it is, then it couldn't be a Talbot. Well, well. Let me think. It is not a Beychevelle and it is not a Talbot, and yet — yet it is so close to both of them, so close, that the vineyard must be almost in between. Now, which could that be?" He hesitated, and we waited, watching his face. Everyone, even Mike's wife, was watching him now. I heard the maid put down the dish of vegetables on the sideboard behind me, gently, so as not to disturb the silence.

"Ah!" he cried. "I have it! Yes, I think I have it!"

For the last time, he sipped the wine. Then, still holding the glass up near his mouth, he turned to Mike and he smiled, a slow, silky smile, and he said, "You know what this is? This is the little Château Branaire-Ducru."

Mike sat tight, not moving.

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"And the year, 1934."

We all looked at Mike, waiting for him to turn the bottle around in its basket and show the label.

"Is that your final answer?" Mike said.

"Yes, I think so."

"Well, is it or isn't it?"

"Yes, it is."

"What was the name again?"

"Château Branaire-Ducru. Pretty little vineyard. Lovely old château. Know it quite well. Can't think why I didn't recognize it at once."

"Come on, Daddy," the girl said. "Turn it round and let's have a peek. I want my two houses."

"Just a minute," Mike said. "Wait just a minute." He was sitting very quiet, bewildered-looking, and his face was becoming puffy and pale, as though all the force was draining slowly out of him.

"Michael!" his wife called sharply from the other end of the table. "What's the matter?"

"Keep out of this, Margaret, will you please."

Richard Pratt was looking at Mike, smiling with his mouth, his eyes small and bright. Mike was not looking at anyone.

"Daddy!" the daughter cried, agonized. "But, Daddy, you don't mean to say he's guessed it right!"

"Now, stop worrying, my dear," Mike said. "There's nothing to worry about."

I think it was more to get away from his family than anything else that Mike then turned to Richard Pratt and said, "I'll tell you what, Richard. I think you and I better slip off into the next room and have a little chat?"

"I don't want a little chat," Pratt said. "All I want is to see the label on that bottle." He knew he was a winner now; he had the bearing, the quiet arrogance, of a winner, and I could see that he was prepared to become thoroughly nasty if there was any trouble. "What are you waiting for?" he said to Mike. "Go on and turn it round."

Then this happened: The maid, the tiny, erect figure of the maid, in her white-and-black uniform, was standing beside Richard Pratt, holding something out in her hand. "I believe these are yours, sir," she said.

Pratt glanced around, saw the pair of thin horn-rimmed spectacles that she held out to him, and for a moment he hesitated. "Are they? Perhaps they are. I don't know."

"Yes sir, they're yours." The maid was an elderly woman — nearer 70 than 60 — a faithful family retainer of many years standing. She put the spectacles down on the table beside him.

Without thanking her, Pratt took them up and slipped them into his top pocket, behind the white handkerchief.

But the maid didn't go away. She remained standing beside, and slightly behind, Richard Pratt, and there was something so unusual in her manner and in the way she stood there, small, motionless, and erect, that I, for one,

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found myself watching her with a sudden apprehension. Her old, gray face had a frosty, determined look, the lips were compressed, the little chin was out, and the hands were clasped together tight before her. The curious cap on her head and the flash of white down the front of her uniform made her seem like some tiny, ruffled, white-breasted bird.

"You left them in Mr. Schofield's study," she said. Her voice was unnaturally, deliberately polite. "On top of the green filing cabinet in his study, sir, when you happened to go in there by yourself before dinner."

It took a few moments for the full meaning of her words to penetrate, and in the silence that followed I became aware of Mike and how he was slowly drawing himself up in his chair, and the color coming to his face, and the eyes opening wide, and the curl of the mouth, and the dangerous little patch of whiteness beginning to spread around the area of the nostrils.

"Now, Michael!" his wife said. "Keep calm now, Michael, dear! Keep calm!"

"Q"

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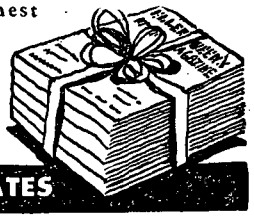

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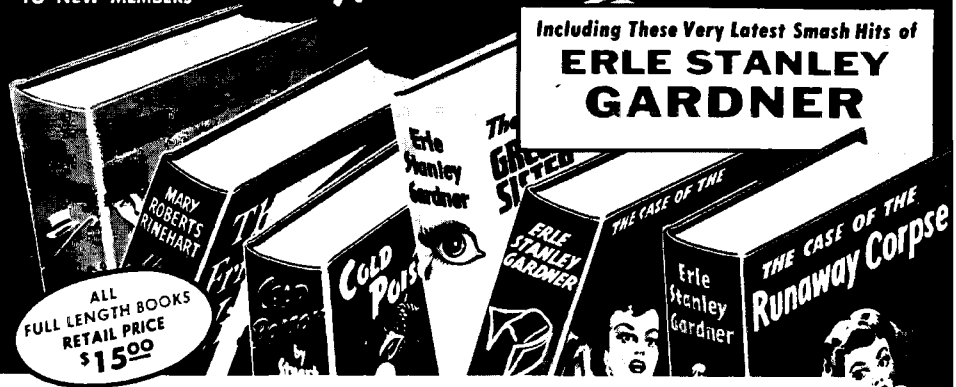

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